

“The Epistle of Joy (Part 10 – Philippians 3:12-4:1)”

Paul writes in Philippians 3:12-4:1: “*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but; I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.* ¹³ *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,* ¹⁴ *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* ¹⁵ *Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.* ¹⁶ *Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.* ¹⁷ *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.* ¹⁸ *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.* ²⁰ *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.* ^{4:1} *Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.”*

The Apostle Paul was determined to forget his *past*, in the sense that he was no longer going to be influenced or affected by it. His all-consuming pursuit in the *present* was to know Jesus Christ more and more intimately. That present pursuit would be fully rewarded in the *future* when Christ returns or takes believers home to be with Him at the time of death. Paul had some incredible experiences in the 25 years he had walked with Christ, but he was not completely satisfied with the status of his spiritual life. But he was forever pressing on in the direction of Christlikeness. In this passage Paul urges his beloved brothers and sister in Philippi to *stand fast in the Lord*. Here’s the main idea: ***you will never coast into Christlikeness because spiritual growth is intentional, not automatic.***

The Apostle Paul shares 10 principles in Philippians 3:12-4:1 to help us *stand fast in the Lord*:

1. **Press on** (3:12, 14). Don’t give up or settle in a place of spiritual stagnation. Like a runner in a race strain every spiritual muscle and nerve to go hard for the tape and win the prize.
2. **Forget what is behind** (3:13). Looking behind will mess you up in the present. Break the power of your past by allowing the Lord to unfetter you from its influence. We need to forget both the garbage of good stuff and the garbage of guilty stuff. We need to stop punishing ourselves for past failures and stop patting ourselves for our past successes.
3. **Strain toward what is ahead** (3:13-14). Look up and look ahead because we are called heavenward. Live for eternity. Keep moving forward. Don’t ever look back, or slow down, or relax your effort, or slack off, or lower your standards.
4. **Be mature and take a Scriptural view of things** (3:15). You will never *stand firm in the Lord* until you adopt a Scriptural worldview. Get into the Word and let the Word get into

you. Know what the Scriptures say. When you see things the Bible's way you'll realize that all sin stinks in the sight of God, and all the best of human righteousness is nothing more than a pile of filthy rags.

5. **Live up to what we have already attained** (3:16). Keep moving closer and closer to Jesus, even if you have to sometimes circle back around and re-learn a lesson you thought you had mastered.
6. **Follow the example of those who live according to the pattern of Scripture** (3:17). One Pastor wrote: *“Think of the Christian life as a long parade from earth to heaven. At the head of the line is Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation. Step by step He is leading His followers to glory. It's a long road with many twists and turns but He wants us to make it in the end. Since the parade is long and filled with millions of people, we need folks in front of us who can keep us on track. We need mentors, models, heroes if you will, people who are farther along in the spiritual journey who can keep us pointed toward the Lord. Without such input, we're likely to veer off the trail and end up in the wilderness.”*
7. **Understand the nature of those who live as enemies of the cross** (3:18-19). Enemies of the cross have lost sight of the glorious future awaiting those whose lives are marked by the cross and they instead live with their minds on present, earthly things. They live for the present, not for eternity.
8. **Understand that our citizenship is in heaven** (3:20). Just as Roman colonists (like the Philippians) never forgot they belonged to Rome, so Christian believers must never forget that we are citizens of heaven.
9. **Eagerly await our Savior from heaven** (3:20). Never forget: Jesus is coming again! Those who start becoming more earthly-minded become dull in their expectation of future things.
10. **Understand that Christ will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body** (3:21). One day (in the very near future) we will be freed from this corruptible flesh and our eternal spirit will be housed in a glorious body just like Jesus'!

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Are you dissatisfied with your present spiritual status? Good! Let that propel you toward greater and greater Christlikeness.
2. Are you giving maximum effort in your pursuit of Christ? Or are you a Christian gliding on cruise control?
3. Determine to no longer be affected by things in your past that you cannot change that have been repented of and forgiven.
4. Live in the Word and let the Word live in you.
5. Who are the good examples in your life? Emulate them. Who are the bad influences in your life? Keep your distance. Try to be just like Jesus, so you can be a good example to those who are following you.
6. Make sure your earthly conduct is a good reflection of your heavenly citizenship.
7. Never stop being watchful and excited about the soon, imminent, glorious coming of the Lord!