

**Pressing Toward the Mark****Lesson Scope:** [Philippians 3](#)

*References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise*

Lesson Focus: In chapter 3 the apostle Paul picks up on the thought he touched on in 2:16, that of looking forward to the end of the race. He assures his readers that he does not find it irksome to keep writing the same admonitions. Admonitions are needed in order to successfully run the Christian race. The Judaizers were a threat to the Christian faith. They insisted that Christianity was merely a sect of Judaism and sought to incorporate believers into Judaism by teaching them that salvation involved the Mosaic Law. The apostle stresses the need to count everything as loss except those things that aid us in our Christian race. Those things that side-track us from a complete commitment to Christ become baggage that can wear us out before we reach our goal. The eternal reward for the faithful lies at the end of the Christian race. Only those who “count all things but loss” and zealously “press toward the mark” will obtain the prize.

Spiritual progress is important. We never reach a place where we have no need for growth. Rather than this thought being a discouragement to the Christian, we should see the Christian life as an upward climb that culminates when we reach our eternal home. Avoid applying Paul’s references to the Mosaic Law in verses 3-7 to church guidelines and boundaries. The Judaizers taught the Mosaic Law to avoid the offense of the cross. Today many professing Christians disregard the restraints of church and the Spirit to avoid the offense of the cross. Essentials are not optional. Those who stay faithful in the essentials can look forward to the glorious conclusion of verse 21.

**Lesson Aim:** To identify essentials for spiritual progress.

**Theme Verses:** [Philippians 3:13-14](#). Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

## Lesson Text:

### “We . . . Have No Confidence in the Flesh”

**Philippians 3:1-11**<sup>(KJV)</sup> Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed *is* not grievous, but for you *it is* safe. <sup>2</sup> Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. <sup>4</sup> Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: <sup>5</sup> Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup> Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, <sup>9</sup> And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: <sup>10</sup> That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; <sup>11</sup> If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

### “I Press Toward the Mark”

**Philippians 3:12-19**<sup>(KJV)</sup> Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also, I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. <sup>13</sup> Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. <sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. <sup>17</sup> Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. <sup>18</sup> (For many walks, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: <sup>19</sup> Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is* *their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

## **“Our Conversation Is in Heaven”**

**Philippians 3:20-21** <sup>(KJV)</sup> For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>21</sup> Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **“We . . . Have No Confidence in the Flesh”**

1. Why might Paul have begun this chapter with the exhortation to “rejoice in the Lord” (3:1)?
2. What were the “same things” that Paul kept reminding them of (3: 1)?
3. How could we be guilty of being satisfied with “[our] own righteousness” (3:9)?
4. What is needed to “attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (3:11)? **“I Press Toward the Mark”**
5. What was Paul seeking to apprehend (3:12)?
6. What are some things “Which are behind” that we need to forget (3:13)?
7. What are some present-day areas where we need to walk by the same rule (3:16)?

#### **“Our Conversation Is in Heaven”**

8. What is the final Work of redemption that the believer can look forward to (3:21)?

### **Analysing the Passage:**

The term dogs (3:2) was used by the Jews as relating to something ceremonially impure, such as the Gentiles. Here it is used to describe unbelieving Jews whose teachings marred the purity of the Gospel. The concision (3:2) refers to the Judaizers who taught that the Gentiles must be circumcised. “The loss of all things . . . that I may win Christ” (3:8) shows us how much Paul gave up and the value he placed on being able to experience “the righteousness which is of God by faith” (3:9). “Being made conformable” (3:10) and “fashioned like unto” (3:21) are translated from similar Greek words. If we want to experience a glorified resurrected body like Christ’s, we must experience death by dying to self now.

Conversation (3:20) means “citizenship.” We are ambassadors on this earth, representing the country where we truly belong.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **“We . . . Have No Confidence in the Flesh”**

1. Rejoicing in the Lord helps to condition our minds for spiritual progress (3:1). Christian joy helps to make the attractions of the world less attractive. We cannot find godly teaching and repeated admonitions on the dangers around us to be “grievous.” If we are finding fulfillment in our Christian experience, we will want to move on in our Christian walk.
2. God’s people must beware of false teachers (3:2). Already in Paul’s time there were false teachers who taught a Gospel that did not involve cross bearing (Galatians 5:11). The same is true today. We need to avoid those whose teaching and life do not require self-denial, submission to the brotherhood, and separation from the world.
3. God’s people progress spiritually through the power of God, not by confidence in the flesh (3:3-7). A godly heritage, years of experience in Christian living, a knowledge of the Word of God, and the confidence of our brethren can all have their place and be an encouragement to us. However, if we trust in who we are and our own understanding and discernment, we will be disappointed. Even the newest believer who seeks to be led by God and is open to His leading through His Word, His Spirit, and His people will enjoy spiritual growth.
4. To “win Christ” we must focus on things that count (3:8-11). The apostle Paul understood that the things that count would involve personal loss and suffering. The things that are most important to us are where our time and energy will go. Do we schedule our work so we and our families can be at midweek meetings and other special meetings? Can we spare our youth to attend Bible school or to teach school somewhere? Are we willing to experience “the fellowship of his sufferings” so we can experience “the power of his resurrection”?

### **“I Press Toward the Mark”**

5. To progress spiritually, we must understand our need for growth (3:12-14). Like the athlete who pushes himself until he reaches the finish line, we must “press toward the mark.” We cannot plateau in our Christian life, satisfied we have grown as much as is necessary and so all we need to do is maintain what we have. When God reveals areas in need of

growth, we respond by being willing to accept the help and direction of our brethren and the promptings of the Spirit.

6. Being open to a fuller understanding of ourselves is essential for spiritual progress (3:12-15). It is important to experience Christian growth with our brethren. There will be times in this process when we discover needs in our life that affect our ability to grow and harmonize with our brethren. Maybe we discover that we are too opinionated, or maybe we are lax in practical application to God's Word. Or maybe the church is making a new practical application to principles, and I am not willing to conform. How we respond to the promptings of the Spirit and the concerns of our brethren regarding our own needs will have a great effect on our spiritual progress.

7. Spiritual progress is enhanced by brotherhood unity (3:16-17). When a brotherhood experiences unity, all can benefit from each other's gifts and strengths. A lack of unity wears out those who are most in need of encouragement. The weak and the new in the faith are strengthened and encouraged when the brotherhood is united in facing the challenges of our time. Unity leaves a clear example for them to follow.

### **“Our Conversation Is in Heaven”**

8. Eager anticipation for the coming of the Lord Jesus inspires spiritual progress (3:20-21). As the world drifts into more open acceptance of sin, the Christian sees ever more clearly that he does not fit in. This should increase our anticipation for Christ's return. Anticipating the return of our Lord should cause us to do all we can to make sure there is nothing that would keep us from entering that eternal city where our citizenship is and where the child of God will truly belong.

### **Important Teachings**

1. Rejoicing in the Lord helps to condition our minds for spiritual progress (3:1).

2. God's people must beware of false teachers (3:2).

3. God's people progress spiritually through the power of God, not by confidence in the flesh (3:3-7).

4. To “Win Christ,” we must focus on things that count (3:8-11).

5. To progress spiritually, we must understand our need for growth (3:12-14).

6. Being open to a fuller understanding of ourselves is essential for spiritual progress (3:12-15).
7. Spiritual progress is enhanced by brotherhood unity (3:16-17).
8. Eager anticipation for the coming of the Lord Jesus inspires spiritual progress (3:20-21).
9. Safety is found in time-proven truth with its accompanying practice (3:1).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Why might Paul have begun this chapter with the exhortation to “rejoice in the Lord” (3:1)?

If we are rejoicing in the Lord, we have a defence against the dangers we face. Rejoicing gives us strength to keep pressing on to new heights in our Christian walk.

2. What were the “same things” that Paul kept reminding them of (3:1)? He kept reminding them of the threat of Judaizers and the tendency to put their confidence in the flesh. Paul repeatedly stressed the need for righteousness by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not righteousness produced by the Mosaic Law.

3. How could we be guilty of being satisfied with “[our] own righteousness” (3:9)? We could lose sight of the fact that our good life and godly practices do not save us but rather are the result of a salvation experience. If we justify inner failures and hypocrisy on the basis that we are living an exemplary life, we are trusting in our own righteousness.

4. What is needed to “attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (3:11)? We need to crucify the flesh and die to sin so that we may rise to a new life in Christ. Only as we are faithful unto death will we be found worthy to rise to glory and honour.

5. What was Paul seeking to apprehend (3:12)? ‘Christ “apprehended” (laid hold on) Paul to make him a messenger of His resurrection” (Acts 22:14-15). Paul’s great desire was to be able to someday experience the fulfillment of the hope of the resurrection.

6. What are some things “which are behind” that we need to forget (3:13)? Our failures and any past life of living after the flesh must be left behind. Perhaps even more important as we grow older and life passes more and more quickly, we cannot seek to hang onto this fleeting life. We have a glorious future to gain by pressing ahead.

7. What are some present-day areas where we need to walk by the same rule (3:16)? The present-day challenges brought by technology are made less dangerous if we are unified in facing them. Our witness to the world is more powerful if we are unified in our dress. Our success in raising our families is greater if we stand together.

8. What is the final work of redemption that the believer can look forward to (3:21)? Our bodies have been affected by the Fall. Satan often tempts us to sin through avenues that appeal to our bodies. The final work of redemption is a new body fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body.

### **Summarizing the Lesson:**

I'm pressing on the upward way,  
New heights I'm gaining every day;  
Still praying as I'm onward bound,  
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

My heart has no desire to stay  
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;  
Though some may dwell where these abound,  
My prayer, my aim is higher ground.

I want to live above the world,  
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;  
For faith has caught the joyful sound,  
The song of saints on higher ground.

I want to scale the utmost height,  
And catch a gleam of glory bright;  
But still I'll pray till heaven I've found,  
"Lord, lead me on to higher ground."

—*Johnson Oatman Jr.*

### **Research Guide:**

1. Read Hebrews 6, which shows the importance of spiritual progress and the serious results if we do not progress.
2. Look up these references that relate to spiritual progress: Job 17:9; Psalm 84:7; 92:12; Proverbs 4:18; 1 Timothy 4:15.