



**IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**SERIES: TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL**  
**SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 3:12-4:1**  
**DATE: JUNE 28, 2026**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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Last week, we learned that Paul warned the church against those who would place confidence in their flesh for righteousness. Paul warned the church by saying, “Watch out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh (3:2).

Rather than put confidence in the flesh, Paul urged the church to “rejoice in the Lord” (3:1). Rejoicing in the Lord means that we happily believe that righteousness is attained through our faith in Christ alone; not by our works. We rejoice in what the Lord has done for us; not what we can do for ourselves.

In Paul’s mind, attaining righteousness only came through one avenue. People do not get to choose a way to heaven based on their own preferences. Instead, God has determined the way. God’s way to attain righteousness is only through one’s belief in Jesus. Thus, in Paul’s mind, he realizes the necessity for the Philippians to not be deceived by the “dogs... evildoers... and mutilators of flesh.” These “dogs” were trying to convince the church that salvation is

attained through works. Thus, Paul's fear was the Philippians might be deceived and end up believing in something other than the gospel.

In our passage today, Paul pleads with the church to not be deceived but to continue or press on in their faith in the gospel. To do so, Paul contrasts the reward for those who believe (3:12-16) and the destruction for those who don't (3:17-4:1).

## Text

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### Philippians 3:12-4:1

*<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

*<sup>17</sup> Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

*<sup>4</sup> Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*

## Explanation

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### Pressing On

The ultimate reward for those who believe is the resurrection from the dead. Paul expressed this goal in verse 11 when he says, "that... I may attain the resurrection from the dead." This means that when Paul physically dies, he

expects that death will not be the end of him. He expects to live again in heaven with Jesus. Paul also expects that in heaven he will be made perfect.

Paul points out that presently as he lives on earth, he awaits the resurrection. It is not something that he experiences now. Thus, he says, “Not that I have already attained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”

Part of the way that Paul “presses on” is by forgetting what lies behind. In last week’s lesson, Paul highlighted several things that he left behind in order to gain Christ. In Philippians 3:4-6, Paul describes his previous ways of seeking to attain righteousness through his circumcision, born into the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, and how he zealous and blameless. Yet, despite these things, he chose to count them as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ (3:7-8). Having turned to Christ, Paul strains forward, not looking back. He wants the Philippians to continue forward in Christ and to not return to the law.

Remember the context that Paul is speaking into. Paul is concerned about the Philippians being deceived into believing something other than the gospel for their salvation. Thus, Paul is urging them to continue in the faith that they previously professed. They were not to seek to attain the resurrection based on their works. Paul from his personal example says, “Brothers, I do not consider that *I have made it my own.*” Paul explains that he is not attempting to attain the resurrection through his own works. *Paul has not made it his own* as if he accomplished it by his works. Instead, Paul explains that he has received the promise of the resurrection as the result of the *upward call* from God. By God’s grace, God called him; by faith Paul accepted that call.

Paul continues, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” The words “press on” are interesting because they imply effort. Thus, in a play on words, Paul explains that any effort he supplies, it is *not towards self-righteous works*, but it is an *effort to maintain his firm belief* that God has called him to salvation by his grace. He later charges the church, “Only let us hold true to what we have attained.” In other words, Paul commands the church to not forsake your previous belief and be deceived.

Paul remains confident that the Philippians will agree with him. In fact, he is convinced that if anyone thinks differently, then God will reveal the truth to them. In verse 15, Paul once again strikes balance between human responsibility along with God’s inner working within a person. Here, he is charging the Philippians to set their minds on truth and at the same time he

acknowledges that God is active in revealing truth to them. Previously, Paul urged them to “work out their salvation with fear and trembling” while at the same time acknowledging that “...it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:12-13). He also previously said, that “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ” (1:6). The reason we can press on is because God has made us his own.

## Leaving Behind

With Paul having such a close and intimate relationship with the Philippians, he set himself as an example for them to follow. He tells them, “...join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” Interestingly, Paul has told the church to keep their eyes open for two kinds of people. Previously, Paul told the church to be on *look out* for the dogs, evildoers, and mutilators of the flesh (3:2). But now he tells them to keep their eyes on those who walk correctly just as Paul himself walked. Watching out for deception while also looking toward godly examples are both necessary.

Paul movingly explains, “For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.” No doubt Paul considers the Philippian’s faith in Christ as of utmost importance. So important that he would tell them repeatedly. Yet, the more he reminds them, the more he is emotionally moved to tears.

What makes a person an enemy of the cross? Paul describes these enemies as those whose “god is their belly, they glory in their shame, and have minds set on earthly things.” With this description, Paul seems to be saying that enemies of the cross are those who pridefully think they can attain righteousness on their own apart from Christ’s death on the cross. They fail to realize that Jesus’ death on a cross paid the penalty for sins so that salvation can be received by grace through faith. Rather than accept the gift of salvation by faith, these enemies would rather achieve it by certain religious works. They were choosing to focus on earthly things rather than the work of Jesus.

Rather than glory in our bodies, as believers in Jesus, we can confidently expect that our lowly bodies will be transformed. Paul’s language is pointed: if one *glories* in their earthly body, then they won’t receive a *glorious* body in heaven. To be clear, it is not our earthly, lowly bodies that we must change to get to heaven, rather by faith we believe in Jesus knowing that he will one day transform this earthly body and give us a new glorious one. The work is

accomplished through Christ, not ourselves. And whereas these enemies of the cross will one day face destruction, believers will be made citizens of heaven.

But don't miss Paul's major emphasis. Believers are not perfected yet. Paul says, "we *await* a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Thus, believers must continue in their faith, not being deceived into believing something other than the gospel. We must press on... forgetting what lies behind and straining forwards to what lies ahead, so that we may hold true to what we have already attained.

### **Discussion Questions**

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- Do you remember when you were first introduced to Christ? What age were you?
- Have you noticed your understanding about Christ either declining, plateaued, or increasing?
- How confident do you feel that you could share the gospel with another person?
- Paul says he has not already obtained perfection. What does his humility teach us about spiritual maturity?
- Would you say that you are in a place where you feel like you could identify false teaching about Christ or do you need someone else to tell you when a false teaching is wrong?
- What is the difference between learning from the past and living in the past?
- Which do you think requires more effort for a person: Coming to faith in Jesus or protecting your faith in Jesus from deception?
- Paul speaks about some people "with tears." What does this reveal about his heart toward those who have gone astray?
- What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven while still living on earth?

### **Conclusions or Application**

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<b>STANDING FIRM</b>
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It is interesting to observe that as much as Paul compliments and loves the Philippians church, he also felt the need to charge them to remain steadfast in the gospel.

When we read the book of Philippians, we see so many positive descriptions of them. They have partnered with Paul in the gospel (1:5). They sent Epaphroditus to meet his need (2:25-30). We later learn that no other church had entered partnership with Paul in giving and receiving to the degree that they had (4:15). Yet still, Paul sense the need to still warn them of false gospels and to stand firm in their faith.

Here is a key point of application: We never mature to the point where we no longer need to remind ourselves of the gospel. We continually should press on and stand firm in the gospel. As long as Christians live in the world, there will be outright attacks on the gospel as well as deceptive attempts to add to the gospel. We must be on our guard and to stand firm.