



THE PHILIPPIANS
PERSPECTIVE

SEEING LIFE THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS

WEEK 3 BIBLE STUDY

The Chain That Cannot Save You

Digging Deeper into Philippians 3

Monday May 4th - Saturday May 9th



WELCOME TO WEEK 3

This week we walked through Philippians chapter 3 and discovered that performance robs us of dependence on Christ. The chain we have been holding to climb our way to God is already broken.

Only one chain holds. The chain forged by Jesus Himself.

This six-day Bible study is designed to help you go deeper into the themes of Sunday's message. Each day includes a Scripture passage to read, a devotional reflection, study questions for personal application, a daily challenge, and a prayer.

Set aside 15 to 20 minutes each day. Find a quiet place. Open your Bible. And let the Holy Spirit reshape what you have been depending on.

Series Big Idea:

The Christian life is shaped more by perspective than by circumstances.
Paul didn't have better conditions. He had a better perspective.

Week 3 Main Idea:

Performance robs us of dependence on Christ, but the only thing that holds when you stand before God is the finished work of Jesus.

DAY 1 | MONDAY MAY 4TH

The Warning That Safeguards Your Faith

Read: *Philippians 3:1-3*

Paul opens chapter 3 with one of the most loving statements in all of his writing. He is about to repeat a warning that he has already given them many times. And he is happy to do it.

Philippians 3:1 (NLT)

"Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith."

Did you catch that last phrase? "I do it to safeguard your faith." The Greek word for safeguard is *asphales*, which means secure, firm, immovable. Paul is saying that what he is about to teach is so essential to their spiritual security that he is willing to repeat himself again and again. Because the deception he is warning them about could cost them everything.

Then look at what he says next.

Philippians 3:2-3 (NLT)

"Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort."

Paul is naming a specific group of false teachers called the Judaizers. They were traveling around the early church teaching that faith in Jesus was good but not enough. To really be saved, you also had to be circumcised and keep the Jewish law. They were teaching "Christ plus."

Paul calls them dogs. That is strong language. He is not being mean. He is being protective. Because the moment you add anything to Christ, you have lost Christ. The Gospel is not Jesus plus your effort. The Gospel is Jesus alone.

Then look at how Paul describes true believers in verse 3. "We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort." The Greek phrase for "no confidence" is *ouk peitho*. It means a complete, total refusal to trust. Paul is saying real Christians put zero trust in their own performance. All of their trust is in what Christ has done.

This is one of the clearest tests of true faith. What are you actually relying on? When you think about your standing with God, where does your confidence come from? If your confidence is in something you have done, you are not relying on Christ. You are relying on you. And that is the very deception Paul says he never gets tired of warning about.

Galatians 5:4 (NLT)

"For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace."

That is sobering. Paul says that the moment you start depending on your performance to make yourself right with God, you have cut yourself off from Christ. Not because Christ rejected you. Because you traded Him for a counterfeit.

Study and Reflection Questions

1. Paul says he never gets tired of repeating warnings about depending on performance. Why do you think this particular deception is one we have to be reminded of so often? Where do you find yourself slipping back into performance-based thinking?
2. If someone asked you today, "Why do you believe you are right with God?" what would your honest answer be? Does your answer reveal a confidence in Christ alone, or is there a hidden "plus" you are still relying on?
3. Read Galatians 5:4 again. The thought of being "cut off from Christ" because of self-reliance is heavy. Where in your life have you been functioning as if Christ's work needed your performance to be complete?

Today's Challenge

Take a few minutes today and write out, in one or two sentences, exactly what you are depending on for your relationship with God. Be brutally honest. Then compare what you wrote with Philippians 3:3. If there is a gap, bring it to God in prayer and ask Him to realign your trust.

Prayer

Father, thank You for loving me enough to keep warning me. Show me where I have been quietly depending on myself instead of fully resting in Christ. Cut away the parts of me that still want to earn what You have already given. Anchor my confidence in what Jesus has already done. I want to be one of those who relies on Christ alone and puts no confidence in my own effort. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Resume That Was Worthless

Read: *Philippians 3:4-6*

After warning the Philippians about the Judaizers, Paul does something stunning. He pulls out his own resume. And he holds it up as the perfect example of why human performance is worthless.

Philippians 3:4-6 (NLT)

"Though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin, a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault."

Paul lists seven credentials. Watch the structure of his list carefully because it teaches us something important.

The first three things he lists, he was born into. He could not control them. He inherited them from his parents. He was circumcised on the eighth day. That was not his decision. He was a pure-blooded Israelite. He could not earn that. He was from the tribe of Benjamin. The same tribe as King Saul. He had royal religious heritage. None of it was his doing.

The next four were things he achieved. He was a Pharisee, the strictest religious sect in Israel. He was zealous, so passionate that he persecuted Christians. And as for righteousness, he obeyed the law without fault. Paul is saying his religious resume was flawless.

Now stop and think about this. If anyone in human history had earned the right to stand before God based on performance, it would have been Paul. He had the right family, the right tribe, the right ritual, the right religious training, the right zeal, the right behavior, and the right reputation. He had everything.

And here is what Paul wants every one of us to see. There are two ways people try to earn their way to God. By inheritance and by effort. And both are useless.

Salvation is not by birth. You cannot inherit this from your parents. It does not matter who your grandfather was. It does not matter how religious your family is. It does not matter that your mom prayed for you. Salvation does not transfer through DNA.

Salvation is not by works. You cannot work for this. It does not matter how many hours you have served. It does not matter how much you have given. It does not matter how good you have tried to be. The most religiously accomplished man of his generation said his works were worthless.

Salvation is not by zeal or sincerity. You cannot be sincerely wrong and be saved by your sincerity. Paul was sincere when he was persecuting Christians. He genuinely believed he was doing God's work when he was hunting down believers. He was zealous. He was committed. He was devoted. And he was sincerely wrong. Sincerity does not save you. Truth does.

The only thing that matters is knowing Christ. Not what your family did before you. Not what you have done since. Just Christ.

Titus 3:5 (NLT)

"He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit."

Salvation is mercy. Not merit. Mercy. And until we stop trying to earn it, we cannot truly receive it.

Study and Reflection Questions

1. If you wrote out your own "religious resume," what would be on it? What inherited religious markers (family heritage, denomination, baptism as a baby, growing up in church) and what personal achievements (church attendance, service, giving, behavior) would you list? Be specific.
2. Paul says salvation is not by birth, not by works, and not by sincerity. Which one of these three is most likely to be a hidden source of confidence for you? Why?
3. Read Titus 3:5. If salvation is by mercy, not merit, how does that change the way you should approach God in prayer, in worship, and in obedience? Does mercy make you lazy or grateful?

Today's Challenge

Take the religious resume you imagined yourself writing in question 1. Picture yourself crumpling it up and laying it at the foot of the cross. Pray over it. Tell God that none of those things are saving you, and you do not want to depend on them anymore. Then thank Him that Christ is enough.

Prayer

Father, I confess that I have, at times, found quiet confidence in my religious resume. I have looked at my heritage, my decisions, my service, my behavior, and let those things be the foundation of my standing with You. Forgive me. Strip me of every false confidence. Help me to see, like Paul did, that all of it is worthless compared to knowing Jesus. I want my confidence to be in Christ alone. In His name, amen.

The Great Exchange

Read: *Philippians 3:7-9*

After listing his religious credentials, Paul does something that would have shocked his original readers. He takes everything he just bragged about and throws it in the trash.

Philippians 3:7-8 (NLT)

"I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ."

The Greek word Paul uses for "garbage" is *skubala*. In ancient Greek, this word referred to refuse, scraps, the kind of thing you would throw out for the dogs. But it also commonly referred to human waste. It is a vulgar word. It is a strong word. And Paul is using it on purpose. He is saying that every religious credential he ever earned, every accomplishment he was once proud of, every box he ever checked on his religious resume, ended up smelling like garbage compared to actually knowing Jesus Christ.

That is a violent word picture. Paul is not just saying his old life was less valuable than Christ. He is saying it was repulsive in comparison. The things he had spent his entire life building up, the things he had been proud of, the things he had used to define himself, were nothing more than waste compared to the infinite value of knowing Jesus.

Then look at the next verse. This is one of the most theologically dense and most precious sentences Paul ever wrote.

Philippians 3:9 (NLT)

"and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith."

This is the great exchange of the Gospel. Paul stops counting on his own righteousness. He stops trying to be good enough. He stops trying to perform his way to acceptance. And in exchange, he receives a righteousness that does not come from him at all. It comes from Christ. It is given as a gift through faith.

Think about what this means. The righteousness God requires is perfect righteousness. None of us has it. Not on our best day. Not after our most committed season of obedience. Not even after a lifetime of sincere effort. We do not have it.

But Jesus does. He lived a perfect life. He never sinned. Not once. And on the cross, He took the record of our sin and absorbed the punishment we deserved. And in exchange, He gave us His perfect record of

righteousness as a gift.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)

"For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."

He took your sin. He gave you His righteousness. That is the exchange. And it is received not by working but by believing. Not by trying but by trusting. Not by performing but by resting.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

"God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."

Saved by grace. Through faith. As a gift. Not a reward. Not earned. Not deserved. Not paid for. A gift.

If you have grasped this, even a little, the only response is worship. Because the One you could never earn your way to has reached down to you, taken what was repulsive, and given you what is precious. That is the Gospel. And it never gets old.

Study and Reflection Questions

1. Paul calls everything in his religious resume "garbage" compared to knowing Christ. Have you ever experienced a moment where Christ became so real to you that the things you used to find your identity in suddenly felt small? What was happening in that season?
2. Read Philippians 3:9 slowly. Paul says he received righteousness through faith in Christ, not through his own efforts. Why is it so much harder to rest in given righteousness than to chase earned righteousness? What in our hearts wants to earn it?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. The exchange is staggering. Your sin for His righteousness. How would your daily walk with God change if you truly believed and lived in the reality of that exchange every single day?

Today's Challenge

Find a quiet moment today. Read Philippians 3:7-9 out loud. Then say this prayer slowly: "Jesus, You took my sin. You gave me Your righteousness. I receive it as a gift today. I will not try to earn what You have already given." Sit with that truth for a few minutes. Let it settle. Let it heal whatever performance pressure has been weighing you down.

Prayer

Jesus, the exchange takes my breath away. You took what was repulsive in me and gave me what is precious in You. I do not deserve it. I cannot earn it. I can only receive it. Today I receive it again. I

*let go of every attempt to add to Your finished work. Your righteousness is enough. You are enough.
Help me live every day in the wonder of that truth. In Your name, amen.*

Knowing Christ

Read: *Philippians 3:10-11*

After Paul declares that he received righteousness through faith in Christ, he tells us what consumes him next. And it is not what most modern Christians would expect.

Philippians 3:10-11 (NLT)

"I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!"

Paul wants to know Christ. The Greek word for "know" here is *gnonai*. It does not mean to know facts about someone. It means to know experientially. Deeply. Intimately. Personally. The same word was used in the Old Testament for the deepest kind of knowing in marriage. Paul is saying he wants more than information about Jesus. He wants intimacy with Jesus.

This is the great failure of modern Christianity. We have made Christianity a system of belief instead of a relationship of intimacy. We can quote verses we have never lived. We can teach truths we have never tasted. We can argue theology we have never knelt before in worship. And in all of it, we have substituted information for intimacy.

But Paul says the goal of his life is to actually know Christ. Not just believe correctly about Him. Know Him. Walk with Him. Experience Him.

Then look at the three things Paul wants to experience.

First, the power that raised Jesus from the dead. The Greek word for power is *dynamis*, where we get the word dynamite. Paul wants the same explosive power that broke open a Roman tomb to be at work in his own life. Not just at salvation. Every day. He wants resurrection power flowing through every weakness, every battle, every moment of dependence.

Second, the fellowship of His sufferings. Paul actually wants to share in Christ's sufferings. That sounds strange to ears that have been trained to avoid suffering at all costs. But Paul understood that suffering with Christ is one of the deepest forms of intimacy with Him. When you suffer for the sake of the Gospel, you are walking the same road Jesus walked. And on that road, you experience Him in ways that comfort never produces.

Third, conformity to His death. Paul wants to be so identified with Christ's death that the old self continues to die a little more every day. This is the daily dying to self that produces real Christlikeness.

Power. Suffering. Death. That is what Paul says he wants. Because every one of those things is part of truly knowing Christ.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NLT)

"This is what the Lord says: 'Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!'"

There is one thing worth boasting in. Knowing God. Not knowing about Him. Knowing Him. And Paul is saying that this single pursuit is worth more than every other pursuit combined.

So here is the question for every one of us today. Do you actually know Christ? Or do you just know about Him? When was the last time you had a tender, intimate, personal experience with the living Jesus? Not a sermon you heard. Not a verse you read. An actual encounter. If it has been a while, do not let another week go by. Press in. Press deeper. Pursue Him.

Study and Reflection Questions

1. Be honest with yourself today. Is your walk with Christ marked more by information about Him or by intimacy with Him? Where in your life have you accepted knowing about as a substitute for actually knowing?
2. Paul says he wants to experience the power that raised Jesus from the dead. Where do you most need that resurrection power right now? In an addiction? In a relationship? In a fear? In a season of weakness?
3. Paul says he wants the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. That goes against everything our culture teaches us. How might God use suffering in your life to deepen your intimacy with Jesus in ways that comfort never could?

Today's Challenge

Today, before you do anything else with God, just sit. Do not pray a list. Do not read a chapter. Just sit in His presence for ten minutes and ask Him to make Himself real to you. Not to give you information. To give you Himself. Knowing Christ is the prize. Pursue it.

Prayer

Jesus, I do not just want to know about You. I want to know You. I want to experience Your power, Your presence, Your love, in real time, every day. Show me where I have settled for facts when You were offering relationship. Show me where I have settled for activity when You were offering intimacy. I want what Paul wanted. To know You. Not as a doctrine. As a Person. Reveal Yourself to

me. In Your name, amen.

Press On

Read: *Philippians 3:12-14*

Paul is one of the most spiritually mature men in the New Testament. He has planted churches all over the Roman Empire. He has written letters that are now Scripture. He has suffered more for Christ than almost anyone. And here is what he says about himself.

Philippians 3:12 (NLT)

"I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me."

Paul, the great apostle, says he has not arrived. He has not achieved perfection. He has not crossed the finish line. He is still pressing on. The Greek word for press on is *diakō*, which was the same word used for an athlete pursuing a prize or a hunter chasing prey. It is not a casual word. It is intense. Focused. Determined.

Then Paul gives us the key to his entire pursuit.

Philippians 3:13-14 (NLT)

"No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us."

Notice three things Paul does.

First, he focuses on one thing. Most of us have a hundred things competing for our attention. Paul says he has narrowed it all down to one. The pursuit of knowing Christ and being made like Him. Everything else is secondary.

Second, he forgets the past. The Greek word for forget is *epilanthanomenos*, which means to no longer let something influence you. Paul is saying that he refuses to let his past, both his failures and his accomplishments, dictate his present. His sins are forgiven. His successes are no longer trophies. He is not living backward. He is living forward.

This is huge. Some of you are stuck looking backward. You are still living in the shame of past sin. You are still trying to make up for things God has already forgiven. Or you are coasting on past spiritual highs, using yesterday's experiences to justify today's apathy. Paul says forget it. Both the failures and the successes. They are behind you. Press forward.

Third, he reaches forward. The Greek word is *ep ekteinomenos*, which describes a runner straining every muscle to lean toward the finish line. Paul is not jogging. He is not coasting. He is straining. Reaching.

Stretching toward what is ahead.

And what is ahead? The prize. The heavenly prize. The day his redemption is complete. The day he is finally and forever made like Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 (NLT)

"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize."

This is so important because some people hear "stop performing" and they think it means "do nothing." That is not what Paul is teaching. Paul is not saying do nothing. He is saying do not depend on what you do. There is a massive difference.

The Christian who has truly grasped grace does not become lazy. They become driven. Not driven to earn what they cannot earn, but driven to know the One who saved them. Driven to be made more like Him. Driven by love, not fear. Driven by gratitude, not guilt. Driven toward the prize, not away from punishment.

So how are you running? Are you coasting? Drifting? Or are you pressing on? Reaching forward? Straining toward the finish line?

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NLT)

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith."

Strip off the weight. Run with endurance. Keep your eyes on Jesus. That is how the race is run. And that is how the prize is won.

Study and Reflection Questions

1. Paul says he focuses on one thing. If you had to honestly identify the one thing your life is most focused on right now, what would it be? Is it the same thing Paul was focused on?
2. Paul says he forgets the past. Are you living forward or backward? Is there a past failure you have not let go of? Or a past success that has made you spiritually lazy? What needs to be forgotten so you can press forward?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-25. Paul talks about the discipline of the runner. Where in your spiritual life do you need to apply more discipline, not to earn anything, but because you are training for an eternal prize?

Today's Challenge

Identify one specific area where you have been coasting. One area where you know the Spirit has been calling you to press in but you have been settling. Make one decision today to stop coasting in that area. A specific commitment. A specific change. Press on.

Prayer

Father, I do not want to coast through my Christian life. I want to run it the way Paul ran his. With focus. With forgetting. With reaching. Help me lay down the past, both the failures and the achievements, and stretch forward toward what You have for me. Keep my eyes on Jesus. Keep my heart hungry for what is ahead. I do not want to drift. I want to press on. In Jesus' name, amen.

Citizens of Heaven

Read: *Philippians 3:17-21*

Paul ends Philippians 3 with one of the most heartbreaking passages in any of his letters. And then he ends it with one of the most hope-filled.

Philippians 3:18-19 (NLT)

"For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth."

Paul is weeping as he writes this. Tears in his eyes. Why? Because he knows there are many people who think they are saved and they are not. Their conduct shows that they are actually enemies of the cross. They have given lip service to Christianity while living for their flesh. They have used the label of "Christian" without ever actually surrendering to Christ.

And here is what Paul wants you to see. The way someone lives reveals what they actually believe. You can claim to follow Jesus, but if your god is your appetite, if you brag about shameful things, if you think only about this life and not the next, your conduct is exposing what your mouth is denying.

This is sobering. But Paul does not end here. Look at how he closes the chapter.

Philippians 3:20-21 (NLT)

"But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control."

This is the hope. We are citizens of heaven. Our true home is not here. Our identity is not built on this earthly life. Our values, our priorities, our affections, all of it should be shaped by the reality that we belong to another kingdom.

Philippi was a Roman colony. The people there were proud of their Roman citizenship even though they lived hundreds of miles from Rome. They spoke Latin. They wore Roman clothes. They followed Roman customs. They identified with Rome more than with the local culture around them. Why? Because their citizenship shaped their identity.

Paul is saying believers should live the same way. Yes, you live in this world. But you are not of it. Your home is heaven. Your King is Jesus. Your hope is His return. And the way you live should show it.

Then Paul gives us the most beautiful promise. When Jesus returns, He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like His own. The Greek word for "change" is *metaschmatisei*, which means to completely transform. Not improve. Transform. Our bodies, broken by sin and decay, will be made glorious. Like the resurrected body of Jesus.

This is the prize Paul has been pressing toward all chapter long. The day of complete redemption. The day weakness is replaced with glory. The day mortality is swallowed up by life. The day we finally lay hold of what Christ laid hold of for us when He saved us.

1 John 3:2 (NLT)

"Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is."

We will be like Him. That is the destiny of every true believer. Not just forgiven. Transformed. Conformed. Glorified. Made fully into the image of Christ.

Colossians 3:2-4 (NLT)

"Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory."

Your real life is hidden with Christ. Your real home is heaven. Your real future is glory. So live like it. Stop letting this temporary life define you. Stop letting earthly cares consume you. Stop chasing things that will not last. Set your eyes on what is coming. Live like a citizen of heaven who is just passing through.

Study and Reflection Questions

1. Paul says some people's conduct shows they are enemies of the cross even though they may claim to follow Christ. Without naming names, have you ever known someone whose lifestyle did not match their profession of faith? How does that challenge you to examine your own life?
2. Paul says we are citizens of heaven. If a stranger looked at the way you spend your time, money, and energy, would they conclude that you are mostly a citizen of this world or mostly a citizen of heaven? What would need to change for the answer to be different?
3. The promise of Philippians 3:20-21 is staggering. One day Jesus will transform your weak mortal body into a glorious one like His. How does that promise change the way you face suffering, sickness, aging, and the brokenness of this life?

Today's Challenge

This is the last day of the study. Take some time to reflect on the entire week. Then write down one specific way you want to live differently as a citizen of heaven going forward. Maybe it is in how you spend your time. Maybe it is in what you chase after. Maybe it is in how you respond to suffering.

Pick one thing and commit to it.

Prayer

Father, thank You for this week. Thank You for showing me that performance robs me of dependence on Christ and that the only chain that holds is the one He forged. Thank You for the great exchange. My sin for His righteousness. My broken effort for His finished work. Help me live every day as a citizen of heaven. Press on toward the prize. Reach for the day my redemption is complete. And use my life, until that day, to point others to the One who saved me. In Jesus' name, amen.