

PHILIPPIANS

Chapter 3

Righteousness Through Faith in Christ

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. 2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

3:1 Finally. Marks a transition to a new section as Paul moves toward his conclusion; this does not mark the close of the letter, however (cf. 4:8). (CSB)

The Apostle very likely had finished writing the first two chapters as his letter, and later he wrote chapters 3 and 4 as his postscript. In His inspiration the Holy Ghost accommodated Himself to all the human peculiarities of the write. (Stoeckhardt)

The apostle had made the usual transition toward the close of his letter, in the recommendation of his fellow-workers. He probably wanted to add the customary greetings. But there were some other matters that the Philippians needed to be reminded of. The Holy Ghost in the matter of inspiration accommodated Himself entirely to the human manner of writing letters. (Kretzmann)

rejoice in the Lord! See 4:4. (CSB)

The appeal to rejoice is the keynote of the whole epistle. He calls on them to rejoice in the Lord. They should remember all they are and have as Christians they thank to their communion with Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

Paul takes up a new thought: For the rest, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. So far as all the rest was concerned, whatever else he may have wished to say to them, that one point, which he made the motto of his letter, should always be before their eyes. (Kretzmann)

same things. Matters taken up in the verses that follow, which Paul had previously dealt with either orally when he was in Philippi or perhaps in an earlier letter. (CSB)

Paul does not need to add new things, but wants to remind the readers of the truth they have already heard, as Jesus told His apostles (John 14:26). (TLSB)

“it is not annoying to me,” or, “I am not reluctant to write to you the same thing,” says the Apostle. Why not? Because it has the tendency to confirm them in the truth, to make them firm in the faith, so that they would be less apt to fall. (Stoeckhardt)

safe for you. Where serious error is present, there is safety in repetition. (CSB)

It is always necessary for the safety of believers to make them more certain of their standing toward Christ and God. (Kretzmann)

Throughout the OT, God continually warned Israel about forgetting His Word and admonished them to remember it. Reminders of the truth provide safety against the constant assault of falsehood. (TLSB)

3:2 look out – The Apostle now continues with a warning against deceivers and false teacher, who threaten to rob the Philippians of their joy in the Lord. When a person is really glad that he is a Christian, he shies away from false teachers. (Stoeckhardt)

With a three-fold “watch out” Paul warns against threat to the Philippians’ spiritual safety. He again uses the teaching style of repeating something he hopes to impress upon his readers. (PBC)

The Philippian congregation was a fine congregation, but danger was threatening. Perhaps fresh news concerning the activity of certain false teachers in their area had just reached the apostle. At any rate he used very forceful and vigorous language here to condemn them. There is a vehemence here which is uncharacteristic of the rest of this primarily cheerful epistle. This does not surprise us. Paul always became excited when the gospel was at stake. This shows his deep love and concern for the souls of the believers whose spiritual needs he served. (PBC)

Paul uses three different terms to refer to the enemies of the gospel against whom he is warning the Philippians here, but with all three he is actually referring to the same enemies, who are commonly called Judaizers. Judaizers were Jews or Gentile converts to Christianity who claimed to believe in Jesus as their Savior, but they also taught that in addition to believing in Jesus, it was necessary to keep certain ceremonial laws that God had given to the OT Israelites through Moses. (PBC)

The Judaizers placed special emphasis on the rite of circumcision, the OT sign of God’s covenant with Israel. By their insistence on the outward observance of laws and ceremonies as a necessity for salvation, in addition to faith, the Judaizers confused law and gospel. They attempted to rob OT believers of the freedom from the OT laws and ceremonies that Jesus won for them, and they also continued to plant in human hearts the damnable idea that human beings can somehow make a contribution toward their own salvation. These Judaizers were a very real threat to the life and faith of the early church. They apparently established no congregations of their own, but they tried to worm their way into existing congregations. Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians chiefly to combat the Judaizers’ teachings. He also indicated that Judaizers were troubling the Corinthians. (PBC)

dogs. A harsh word for Paul’s opponents, showing their aggressive opposition to the gospel and the seriousness of their error and its destructive, “devouring” results (cf. Gal 5:15). Their teaching was probably similar to what Paul had to oppose in the Galatian churches (see Introduction to Galatians: Occasion and Purpose). (CSB)

Dogs were a fairly despised animal in biblical times because they preyed on the sick, dying, or dead (e.g. dogs devoured Jezebel after she was thrown from her window, 2 Kings 9:36). (TLSB)

He says “have your eyes on such people.” What people are meant is indicated by the following nouns. Look out for “dogs.” What follows later seems to indicate that here rather impudent, vulgar persons are meant, who made the belly their god. These people were by no means idlers, but workers, who pretended to teach the Word of God, and so made believe that they labored in the Word and doctrine. (Stoeckhardt)

For that reason Paul is constrained to add an emphatic warning: Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision. The apostle uses the very strongest terms of reproach to characterize the false teachers, to portray them in their real colors. There were certain bad, evil, dangerous workers in the very midst of the church, upon whom the Philippians must keep a watchful eye. And in what respect they are dangerous Paul shows by giving a summary of their false doctrine. He had probably thought that he would have an opportunity to attend to the matter of these false teachers in person when he came to Philippi. But the Spirit has now induced him to include the warning in this letter. If there is danger of false teaching in the Church, it is foolish to procrastinate, the warning must be given at once, especially if the evil workers, the false preachers, arise in the midst of the Church. (Kretzmann)

mutilate. Again a strong, painfully vivid term; the false teachers have so distorted the meaning of circumcision (cf. v. 3) that it has become nothing more than a useless cutting of the body. (CSB)

He calls them the “concision,” sarcastically alluding to “circumcision,” which they demanded of their hearers in their preaching. The Apostle here makes a pun to render the insistence upon circumcision as ludicrous and useless. The people upon whom the Philippians were to fix their eyes with caution were Judaistic legalists, who tried to force Christians to be circumcised. Such worker he called “evil-workers,” not because they did not work hard, but because their work was an evil nature, designed to destroy faith in Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

3:3 *circumcision.* Its true, inner meaning is realized only in believers, who worship God with genuine spiritual worship and who glory in Christ as their Savior rather than trusting in their own human effort (cf. Ro 2:28–29; Col 2:12–13; see also Dt 30:6; Eze 36:26). (CSB)

worship by the Spirit of God – The Spirit of God generates a new heart and moves that soul to faith, which is the origin of genuine worship (praise of God and service to neighbor). (TLSB)

glory ... no confidence. Everyone is a “boaster,” either in Christ or in himself. (CSB)

The Apostle and all faithful workers in the Gospel serve God in the Spirit. In them dwells the Spirit of God. In them dwells the Spirit of God and moves them. They do not rely on the flesh and outward works. (Stoeckhardt)

flesh. Weak human nature. Although the term “flesh” in Paul’s letters often refers to sinful human nature, it speaks here of the frailty of human nature: It is not worthy of our confidence; it cannot save. (CSB)

3:4–14 Paul’s personal testimony, a model for every believer; one of the most significant autobiographical sections in his letters (see Gal 1:13–24; 1Ti 1:12–16; cf. Ac 22:1–21; 26:1–23). (CSB)

3:4–6 Paul’s pre-Christian confidence, rooted in his Jewish pedigree, privileges and attainments.

3:4 *confidence* – Paul is speaking of his physical and cultural heritage as an Israelite. (TLSB)

Paul says that outwardly as a Jew he will stand favorable comparison with any other Jew, and even come out on top. (Stoeckhardt)

3:5 *eighth day*. See Ge 17:12. (CSB)

Such infant circumcision points to God’s inclusion of His people in the covenant promise even at a tender age. It also anticipated when circumcision would end and Baptism would become the sign of the new covenant (Col 2:11–12). God finished the work of the original creation on the sixth day, and on the seventh He rested. The eighth day represented a new beginning. Christ finished the work of the new creation by redeeming us with His blood on the sixth day, Good Friday. On the Sabbath, He rested in the tomb. On Easter Sunday, Christ arose, starting the new creation on what may be referred to as the “eighth day.” (TLSB – Note from Gen. 17:12)

of the people of Israel. Paul was born a Jew and was not a proselyte. (CSB)

Very probably these Judaistic false teachers had originally been Jewish proselytes, with whom the Apostle contrasts himself as a native Jew. That is why he also stresses his circumcision on the eighth day. (Stoeckhardt)

tribe of Benjamin. His Jewish roots are deep and unambiguous. Jerusalem, the Holy City, lay on the border of the tribal territory of Benjamin. (CSB)

Hebrew of Hebrews. In language, attitudes and life-style (see Ac 22:2–3; Gal 1:14). (CSB)

There are only Hebrews in Paul’s known ancestry. He was fiercely loyal to his race as a Hebrew. (TLSB)

Pharisee. See Ac 22:3; 23:6; 26:5. (CSB)

A most earnest sect of Judaism. (TLSB)

3:6 *as to zeal* – There could be no doubt that Paul had been perfectly sincere, absolutely conscientious as a keeper of the Law, that he had a clean record before the Jews, though he had acted in moral blindness. (Kretzmann)

persecutor of the church – Because Paul had been convinced that Jesus Christ intended to undermine Jewish law, he persecuted the followers of Jesus and the apostles and tried to destroy them (Ac 9:1–2). (TLSB)

righteousness under the law. Righteousness produced by using the law as an attempt to merit God’s approval and blessing (cf. v. 9)—a use of the law strongly opposed by Paul as contrary to the gospel itself (see Ro 3:27–28; 4:1–5; Gal 2:16; 3:10–12). (CSB)

blameless. In terms of legalistic standards of scrupulous external conformity to the law. (CSB)

The Pharisees developed their own system of laws based on the Law of Moses. Paul claimed to keep these laws perfectly (Jesus denounced the; Mt 23:23) (TLSB)

A Jew by birth, and a Pharisee by choice, he had particularly obligated himself to keep the Law. In this he was animated with such zeal that he persecuted the Church, the Christians. So he could lay claim to righteousness, though this was all only of an outward nature. Yet as far as it went, he was without blame. All this he can truthfully say of his past. Yet now he can see and say that all this was no ground for boasting, rather he considers it a tremendous loss. Therefore now he turns from playful irony to a solemn seriousness. Therefore he now describes what he possesses as a Christian and what he has found in Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

3:7–14 Paul’s confidence in Christ. (CSB)

3:7 *but* – “Alla” indicates that he was not in earnest when he boasted about his past. His supposed gain was in reality a great loss. He came to see that all his righteousness had no value in the sight of God whatsoever. (Stoeckhardt)

whatever. The things mentioned in vv. 5–6. (CSB)

gain ... loss. The great reversal in Paul—begun on the road to Damascus (see Ac 9:3–16)—from being self-centered to being centered in Christ. (CSB)

The Greek word is *zemia* which means damage or disadvantage. Paul realized that confidence in his heritage and works actually interfered with knowing God. The Formula of Concord says, “If anyone wants to drag good works into the article of Justification, rest his righteousness or trust for salvation on them, and merit God’s grace and be saved by them, St Paul himself answers, not us. He says and repeats it three times (Phil 3:7-8) – such a person’s works are not only useless and a hindrance, but are also harmful. This is not the fault of the good works themselves, but of the false confidence placed in the works, contrary to God’s clear Word FC SD IV 37). (TLSB)

3:8 *count* – *ageomai* – To weigh the options thoughtfully. Paul no longer considers his past training and positions of any value. (QV)

surpassing worth – *hperechon* – He saw the complete divine grace and splendor of Christ. (QV)

knowing Christ Jesus. Not only a knowledge of facts but a knowledge gained through experience that, in its surpassing greatness, transforms the entire person. The following verses spell this out. (CSB)

Simply knowing Jesus exceeded all else. (TLSB)

all – The emphasis is on “all.” Not only what the Apostle has just mentioned, but also other fine things on which the world prides itself, he deems worthless trash. (Stoeckhardt)

rubbish. What Paul now has as a Christian is not merely preferable or a better alternative; in contrast, his former way of life was worthless and despicable. (CSB)

Human waste or dung (TLSB)

gain Christ – Clinging only to Christ, one enjoys all the benefits of Christ. (TLSB)

3:9 *be found in him.* Union with Christ —not simply an experience in the past, but a present, continuing relationship. (CSB)

In contrast to what we gain by our own labor or effort. (TLSB)

righteousness ... from the law. The righteousness gained by one's keeping of the Law fails and ceases. And to come to realize that is a gain. (Stoeckhardt)

righteousness ... by faith. A principal benefit of union with Christ (see Ro 3:21–22; 1Co 1:30; Gal 2:16). (CSB)

Same Greek root as “justify.” The Formula of Concord states, “The word “justify” here means to declare righteous and free from sins and to absolve a person from eternal punishment for the sake of Christ's righteousness, which is credited by God to faith (FC SD III 17). (TLSB)

The righteousness gained through faith in Christ, rather, is the only true righteousness. This righteousness is “from God.” It is recognized as righteousness by God. As one believes in Jesus Christ as one's Savior and Lord, so one has part in His redemption, and so one appropriates His merits, and receives a perfect righteousness, which is approved of God. (Stoeckhardt)

3:10-11 Paul is talking about living a real life of faith rooted in the death and resurrection wrought for us in Baptism. See note, Rm 6:4. Luth: “Everywhere he teaches about the slaying of the old man and the renewing of the inner man” (AE 29:225). (TLSB)

3:10 *know him.*† As in v. 8, this knowledge is not merely factual; it includes the experience of the power of his resurrection (see Eph 1:17–20), of fellowship in his sufferings (cf. Ac 9:16) and of being like him in his death (see 2Co 4:7–12; 12:9–10). Believers already share in Christ's death and resurrection (cf. Ro 6:2–13; Gal 2:20; 5:24; 6:14; Eph 2:6; Col 2:12–13; 3:1). In v. 10, however, Paul speaks of the actual experience of Christ's resurrection power and of suffering with and for him, even to the point of death. (CSB)

power of his resurrection – Christ's resurrection makes our faith and resurrection possible. God has given you an eternal, living soul and will raise your body from the dead. (TLSB)

share his sufferings – He who believes in Christ also enters into “the fellowship of His sufferings.” He who believes must also suffer with Christ. Yet also that is gain. (Stoeckhardt)

The greatest of all honors: to share in the suffering that is required to accomplish tasks of the most fundamental and eternal importance. (TLSB)

like him in his death – A Christian, as the name is meant to indicate, will follow the pattern of Jesus, laying down his or her life for others. (TLSB)

3:11 *by any means.* Not an indication of doubt or uncertainty, but of intense concern and involvement. (CSB)

resurrection. The great personal anticipation of every believer (see Da 12:2; Jn 5:29; Ac 24:15; 1Co 15:23; 1Th 4:16). (CSB)

To be included with those who are raised to life everlasting in a perfected state (1Jn 3:1–3). (TLSB)

The resurrection of the dead is the hope of every Christian. Whoever believes has now already that new life. And in and with Christ he passes through suffering and death on to the resurrection of the dead, which means for him the beginning of eternal life. (Stoeckhardt)

3:1–11 Paul reflects on his heritage and contrasts its value with the blessing of knowing Jesus, who sets us free to invest our lives in the lives of others. Only the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has the power to truly set us free to experience life to the fullest. • Dear Lord Jesus, by Your grace You set me free to live in Your righteousness and in Your image. Loosen my grip on earthly advantage, and take my hand in Yours. Amen. (TLSB)

Straining Toward the Goal

12 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. 13 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, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained. 17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 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.

3:12–21 By his own example the Apostle would incite Christians to strive for holiness, that heavenly jewel, and warns against certain ways which lead to destruction. (Stoeckhardt)

3:12–14 The Christian life is like a race; elsewhere Paul uses athletic imagery in a similar way (1Co 9:24–27; 1Ti 6:12; 2Ti 4:7–8; cf. Mt 24:13; Heb 12:1). (CSB)

3:12 *already obtained* – Just before the Apostle spoke of the resurrection, including its end and aim: eternal life. That is very obviously the object of “obtain.” When one comes to faith he is immediately and completely justified, and so eternal life becomes his own. (Stoeckhardt)

When believers are brought to faith, they become possessors of eternal life. As long as they are in the world, they are like people who hold title to property in a distant land. The title makes the property theirs, but the owners are not yet physically in possession of what rightfully belongs to them. Similarly believers, though they are possessors of eternal life by faith and have the righteousness of Christ, are still also sinners living in a sinful world. They have not yet arrived at the full, physical possession of the perfection of eternal life. So, perhaps in response to the boastful claims of the Judaizers or others who taught that believers by their works could achieve perfection already here on earth, Paul in this section vividly describes the Christian life as a constant straining forward toward the great goal and prize of eternal life that God’s grace holds out to believers in Christ. (PBC)

I have already obtained. Paul's goal is Christ's goal for him, and Christ supplies the resources for him to "press on toward the goal" (v. 14; cf. 2:12–13). (CSB)

Same Gk term. Christ "obtained" Paul so that Paul might also obtain the life of Christ as his own (v 10). (TLSB)

made perfect – It can also mean complete, having realized the purpose for which he was created. (TLSB)

press on – dioko – To hasten towards the goal. (QV)

When Paul wrote these verses, he had been a Christian for many years. During those years he had grown in knowledge of Christ and in conformity to Christ. He had become a revered apostle and had experienced the fellowship of sharing in Christ's sufferings. Most recently he had suffered the loss of his personal freedom for the sake of Christ, but that did not mean that he had "arrived" spiritually or reached the goal of perfection. Paul was still living in a sinful world. He was still a sinner, still troubled by the weaknesses and failings of his sinful nature. Though he was a child of God by faith, he had not yet arrived at the point where he could perfectly and uninterruptedly serve God or enjoy the fullness of the blessings God had in store for him. That would have to wait until he entered heaven. Meanwhile he lived his life as a Christian in a constant striving for holiness. He pressed on toward perfection. (PBC)

What Paul says of his own life here is an important key to viewing our own. As long as we are here on earth, we sinners will not reach perfection. That will come only in heaven's glory. Nevertheless, our Christian lives of growing in Christ and living for him ought to be a constant striving for perfection, with the goal and prize of eternal life kept ever before our eyes of faith. (PBC)

to make my own – Refers to the life that shares in Christ's suffering and resurrection. (TLSB)

3:13-14 We strain against our own sinful nature and against the world and the devil, even while our soul is at peace under God's promises and grace. (TLSB)

3:13 *do not consider* – He has but one goal to strive for and only one direction to turn to, as he "presses on." (Stoeckhardt)

Forgetting. Not losing all memory of his sinful past (see vv. 4–6), but leaving it behind him as done with and settled. (CSB)

Looking back while running ahead is a dangerous procedure for the athlete in a race. It can only result in a loss of speed and direction. (tug of war and straight rope) It can only result in a loss of speed and direction. In the race of his Christian life the apostle did not look back either. He did not look back with pride on past accomplishments which he knew could not earn him anything in God's sight. Nor did he look back in regretful brooding over past sins which had been washed away by Jesus' blood. With each new day he put forth every effort to press ahead, to grow in his Christian living and service to Christ. The long distance runner strains and stretches every muscle, expanding even more energy, if at all possible, as he draws closer to the finish line. Similarly, Paul was expanding all the energy he possessed as a Christian, straining with all his spiritual might as he drew ever closer to the goal and the prize of eternal life. (PBC)

Luke 9:62, “Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

What the Apostle does forget is the old, sinful way of life, which dominated him up till the point of his conversion. This old way of life he must forget in such a way that he denies the way of his sinful flesh daily and continually. One must press forward, goal-ward, looking toward the distant mark. (Stoeckhardt)

straining – It means “giving it his utmost.” TEV (Good News for Modern Man) reads: “I do my best to reach etc.” Like the Olympic runner who gives it his all. Some think that Paul is forgetting the items mentioned in vss. 4-7. Others think that it is more than this, like Romans 7:14-24. It is both. A Christian forgets all his sins and imperfections because Christ has forgiven them. He looks ahead only. A runner who constantly looks back is in danger of losing the race. (Exegetical Notes – Bult)

The Greek and Roman worlds of the apostle’s day shared our American fascination for sports. Archaeologists have unearthed ancient stadia as well equipped as many of our own. Paul uses the picture of the determined runner/athlete here in these verses to illustrate the intense yearning and striving for spiritual perfection that should characterize all believers as they “run the race” of their Christian lives. Success in athletic competition depends not only on ability and conditioning, but also on an athlete’s mental state. Concentration is the key. Overconfidence, lack of mental alertness or “mental toughness” can cost an athlete dearly. (GBP – 15-1 & qb comment – Few champions repeat) (PBC)

Spiritual dullness, overconfidence and lack of concentration can likewise cost Christians. Recall how Paul urged the Philippians in chapter 2:12 never to stop working at their salvation. The apostle is saying basically the same thing here in a slightly different way. The Christian who does not concentrate on living the kind of life to which God calls him may, like the overconfident athlete, be eliminated from the race and in the end lose the blessings God has in store for him. A believer’s sanctification, that is, his life as a Christian in this world, will be perfect. The struggle against sin and the devil must be carried on as long as the Christian is in this world. Neither Paul nor any other Christian can ever afford a lack of concentration of think that the race is as good as run and won. (PBC)

3:14 *I press on* – The prize of victory is everlasting life. It is described as the prize “of the calling of God in Christ Jesus from above.” Already when Christians were called this prize was set before them. This calling is described as being from above. It comes from above, from God, and it calls upward. The prize, this wreath of victory, lies there all ready and complete, won by Christ for all Christians. (Stoeckhardt)

Jesus said that those who believed in Him were begotten from above (Jn 1:12–13). Paul commands us to set our minds on things above (Col 3:1). God draws us through His Word toward the way of life that He intends for us, a life with purpose and meaning that endures. (TLSB)

prize. The winner of the Greek races received a wreath of leaves and sometimes a cash award; the Christian receives an award of everlasting glory. (CSB)

The prize is awarded the winner at the games. The point of comparison is the strenuous effort both for the athlete and for the Christian. At Romans 8:37 Paul said: “we are more than conquerors.” In athletics only one person or one team wins. In Christianity all win. By the way, the root word for “prize” is derived, means “umpire.” In Christianity all win. [Special Olympics

– leader went back and helped someone who had fallen] God has already judged in Paul’s favor. That is a wonderful thought. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

upward. Paul’s ultimate aspirations are found not in this life but in heaven, because Christ is there (see Col 3:1–2). (CSB)

3:15 *therefore* – This goes back to at least verse 12. Verses 12–14 contain the basic truth about justification, sanctification and glorification. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

mature. Those who have made reasonable progress in spiritual growth and stability (see 1Co 2:6; 3:1–3; Heb 5:14). (CSB)

All mature believers should understand their lack of perfection and they should never stop striving for perfection. They should never lose sight of the eternal goal that the Lord has set before them. These are the general principles that should govern believer’s lives. (PBC)

Some Christians are mature, some are not. It has been suggested that it is synonymous here with the words “spiritual men: in 1 Corinthians 3:1 and Galatians 6:1. This thought is worth pursuing. Here in verse 15 it is implied that some Christians do not keep their minds on these things as they ought. What does Paul mean? It surely has to do with the proper understanding of justification and sanctification. Perhaps some were grumbling and found it difficult to suffer for Jesus’ sake. Or, perhaps some were fearful of the future. The mature Christians are to help the immature by the use of God’s revelation and surely Paul means by the Word. We take it to mean this in view of the last part of verse 15. Through His Word and the study thereof God will eventually make clear what they do not understand at the moment. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

As “perfect” Christians have the mind to know and understand that they are not yet perfect. There is always much need for growth and improvement. (Stoeckhardt)

think this way. That expressed in vv. 12–14: There are heights yet to be scaled; do not become complacent. (CSB)

When such Christians then have their eye fixed upon the goal, then God will give them new revelations to overcome erroneous thinking in minor matters. (Stoeckhardt)

think otherwise. If the readers accept the view set forth in vv. 12–14 and yet fail to agree in some lesser point, God will clarify the matter for them. (CSB)

3:16 *only* – It means “just one thing more.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

live up to what ... already attained. Put into practice the truth they have already comprehended. We are responsible for the truth we currently possess. (CSB)

The Apostle has reference to the state of being Christians, to what they as Christians are and have. Being mindful of this, they should willingly follow in the footsteps of the Apostle. (Stoeckhardt)

3:17 *in imitating me.* As Paul follows the example of Christ. (CSB)

Think, speak, and live as Paul does in Christ’s image, as described in 2:5–8. (TLSB)

summimatai – It means to be imitators along with others in following Paul’s example. (QV)

It was important that the Philippians take note of the principles of Christian living that Paul with such care, explains to them here. It was also important for them to choose the right kind of examples to follow as they worked to put these principles into practice. With great affection, and deeply moved by the warning he is now compelled to give, Paul pleads, “Brothers, let me be your example.” (PBC)

By offering himself as an example, a role model for the Philippians, Paul was not boasting. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 he says, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” The Philippians recognized Paul, Timothy and others as spiritually mature believers, whom the Lord Himself had qualified to serve as their examples. Paul understood (See also 1 Timothy 3.) that setting a good example was a necessary part of his calling as an apostle and pastor. Both Paul and the Philippians realized that, because they were surrounded by pagan immorality and by false teachers who wanted to deceive them, they needed good examples. So in genuine concern Paul pleads with them to follow his apostolic example. WE would also do well to ask ourselves what kind of examples we follow, and what kind of examples we set for others. (PBC)

Hebrews 5:12, “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!”

Constantly join each other in following my example. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

walk according. The life-styles Christians lead ought to be models worth following. (CSB)

The Apostle joins himself with other upright servants of the Word. He wants Christian brethren to join in imitating such patterns of sanctification. With these words he points to exemplary Christians who already are imitators of the Apostle. The example of good fellow-Christians they should copy. (Stoeckhardt)

What was the danger against which Paul was warning the Philippians? Most of the earlier commentators and some moderns take it to mean the Judaizers. Many modern commentators take it of antinomian libertines of Epicurean and materialistic tendencies. The translations reflect this difference. Both false doctrine and immoral living cause people to hate the Gospel, to be fleshly minded, to glory in what is truly shameful and to be minded only about earthly matters. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

example – tupon – Copying the godly lifestyle or example/model.

3:18 *told you.* See v. 1. (CSB)

Even in the apostolic Church there were sham Christians. The Apostle uses a severe term to characterize these people. He says they walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. While he had been in Philippi, he had warned against these people orally. But now that he is away, he repeats his warning with tears. (Stoeckhardt)

with tears. See Ac 20:19, 31. (CSB)

His tears indicate that the condition of these people has worsened and that they have inwardly already fallen away. (Stoeckhardt)

Even more dangerous are those “Christians” who show by their lives that they have made worldly things like money, possessions and pleasure their gods. It is not very difficult even for those who really believe they are loyal followers of Jesus to become enemies of the cross in that way. We all need the tear-filled warning the apostle sounds here. We need to regard all these temptations to live for ourselves and not for our Savior with the apostle’s sobering reminder ringing in our ears. (PBC)

walk as enemies of the cross. In glaring contrast to Paul’s conduct (v. 10) and to the truth of the gospel. (CSB)

In particular, Jews who refused to admit their guilt under the Law and so refused to accept that Jesus’ accursed death (crucifixion) was really for their sakes. (TLSB)

Their apostasy has progressed so far that he openly declares them the enemies of the cross of Christ. The latter expression intimates the nature of their sin. By their outward conduct these people show that they are ashamed of the cross of Christ, that they refuse to suffer for Christ’s sake, and that in their daily life they make common cause with the children of this world. (Stoeckhardt)

Paul was probably referring to the Judaizers. By just adding as little (like keeping the law) they were making the cross useless.

3:19 *destruction.* The opposite of salvation. (CSB)

A person is lost, even if he confesses Christ with the mouth, when he does not deny the world. (Stoeckhardt)

Their bodies will certainly perish in time. Their souls are even now perishing under their contradiction of God’s salvation. If unchanged, they will suffer being cut off eternally from God in the lake of fire. (TLSB)

The TEV: “They are going to end up in hell because their god is their bodily desires, they are proud of what they should be ashamed of, and they think only of things that belong to this world.” (Exegetical Notes – Bult)

Here it evidently means that the unregenerate are preoccupied only with thing of this world and use them for sinful purposes. (Exegetical Notes – Bult)

god ...belly. A deep self-centeredness; their appetites and desires come first. (CSB)

They serve the appetites of their human nature, which are self-destructive. (TLSB)

They live to satisfy the lower instincts of life. To provide for the cravings of their belly they regard as the main purpose of their existence. They indulge in gluttony and cater to the pleasure of the palate. Instead of finding their delight in the Lord and glorifying in His name, they seek their delight and glory in the gratification of their base desires of the flesh. (Stoeckhardt)

Friends of Jesus’ cross show by their lives that they have caught the spirit of the cross. Their lives are characterized by unselfishness, humility, and the unceasing desire to know Christ more deeply and to imitate Him more fully. Enemies of the cross are those who substitute selfishness and self-indulgence for love and humility and who live their lives only to satisfy themselves.

“Stomach,” as the apostle used the term here, represents all the desires and appetites of the sinful nature: greed, gluttony, drunkenness, sexual immorality and anything else that satisfies what the sinful nature demands. (PBC)

their shame – It is shameful to do anything that contradicts God’s design for human life, but human arrogance actually prides itself on such behavior and flaunts this attitude as though it were something of which to be proud. (TLSB)

earthly things. They have set their minds on the things of this life; they are antinomians (libertines), the opposite of the legalists of v. 2. (CSB)

Such people are earthly minded. Whoever sets his mind on the things of this earth, though they may yet outwardly lead a respectable life, is also an enemy of the cross of Christ. If Christians do not continually check these evil propensities of their flesh, they fall into mortal sin, whose end is destruction. (Stoeckhardt)

3:20 citizenship. In this world Christians are aliens, fully involved in it, yet not of it (cf. Jn 17:14–16; 1Co 7:29–31; 1Pe 2:11). (CSB)

In a far more sublime and important sense, Paul tells the Philippians, they should realize that their most important citizenship, their spiritual citizenship, is in heaven. Heaven is the real home of believers. Their rights have been secured in heaven, and their interests are being promoted there. Their names are recorded in heaven’s book of life. To heaven their prayers ascend and their hopes aspire. Many of their friends in Christ are already enjoying their full inheritance in heaven, and one day all believers will take up permanent residence there. (PBC)

Their heavenly citizenship should be reflected in the way believers live their lives here on earth. Citizens of heaven should not regard this world as a place to put down permanent roots, nor should they fix their hearts on the things of this world or regard them as permanent possessions. They should consider themselves strangers and pilgrims on earth, and their greatest concern should be with heavenly, spiritual things. (PBC)

Born from above by God’s Word and Spirit. We belong to heaven as children of our heavenly Father. We also live with a consciousness of belonging to a different way of life, one full of love, joy, and enduring significance. “The Church’s authority has its own commission to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments (Matthew 28:19-20). Let it not break into the office of another. Let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world to itself. Let it not abolish the laws of civil rules. Let it not abolish lawful obedience. Let it now dictate laws to civil authorities about the form of society” (AC XXVIII 12-13) (TLSB)

politeuma – This is a joint citizenship with all those who believe. It is a commonwealth or state. Because heaven is our commonwealth we look for our reward there and not on earth.

in heaven. Where Christ is and where they are—in union with him; contrast the “earthly things” of v. 19 (see Eph 2:6; Col 3:1–4). (CSB)

In saying this, the Apostle includes himself with all true Christians. Since heaven is the Christians’ commonwealth, their home, they always see that which is above. In line with that thought is the desired to be free from this sinful flesh. (Stoeckhardt)

from it we wait . See Ro 8:19; 1Co 1:7; 1Th 1:9–10; 2Ti 4:8. (CSB)

From whence we are expecting the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. Once more He will appear as Savior on earth, this time to free His own from this evil world and its sordid life. This sincere yearning for their heavenly citizenship is fulfilled when Christ will come on the Last Day. (Stoeckhardt)

3:21 *power that enables him even to subject.* Christ's present power, earned by his obedience to death (see 2:8) and received in his resurrection and ascension, is universal and absolute (see Mt 28:18; 1Co 15:27; Eph 1:20–22).

Christ has the power to cause all things to comply with His will. (TLSB)

will transform. By the Holy Spirit at the resurrection (see Ro 8:11; 1Co 6:14; 15:50–53).

our lowly bodies. Subject to weakness, decay and death, due to sin (see Ro 8:10, 20–23; 1Co 15:42–44).

like his glorious body. See Ro 8:29; 1Jn 3:2. The resurrection body, received already by Christ, who is the “firstfruits,” will be received by believers in the future resurrection “harvest” (see 1Co 15:20, 49). It is “spiritual,” i.e., transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit (see 1Co 15:44, 46). (CSB)

Paul used Gk terms for “form” related to those in 2:6–8. There, Christ was “formed” in humility. Here, we are “formed” like Christ in glory. (TLSB)