

Pursue:
Pursue Christ More
Philippians 3:1-21

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Dr. Steve Horn

Text Introduction: We have begun this year in the book of Philippians. We are focusing our attention on the word pursue. We learned in chapter one that the greatest aim in life ought to be to pursue Christ. Here's the way Paul said issued that challenge. "Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the Gospel of Christ. It's really the core message of the author's life. Last week, in chapter two, we considered the idea of pursuing the unity of the church. In fact, Paul declared that the unity of the church would make his joy complete.

Here's the lesson of chapter three. You might think it redundant, but I want to consider the idea of "Pursue Christ More."

Even Paul, himself, suggested that he was writing again to them about this matter.

Text: In addition, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write to you again about this is no trouble for me and is a safeguard for you.

² Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh— ⁴ although I have reasons for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

⁷ But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, ¹¹ assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.

¹² Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, ¹⁴ I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you. ¹⁶ In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained. ¹⁷ Join in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and pay careful attention to those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are

focused on earthly things,²⁰ but our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.²¹ He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.

So then, my dearly loved and longed for brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, in this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

Introduction: Philippians is sometimes called the “Book of Joy.” In the letter Paul challenged the Philippians to discover that joy is found in Christ in spite of the circumstances of life. Paul’s message is certainly refreshing in light of his circumstances as a prisoner. His testimony is a powerful one when we consider his circumstances. The question to raise is “Why, the joy?” Paul’s answer lies in his commitment to Christ. Having already announced this goal in chapter one and giving admonishment about their church ministry in chapter two, Paul returned in chapter 3 to his personal testimony about his own relationship to Christ. Verse 14 gives us the word “pursue.” There is such passion in his testimony. We recognize that this is the “goal” of his life.

And so, I want to talk to us about our continued pursuit to know Christ, to know the power of His resurrection, to pursue Him more. Even if we think we are pursuing Christ, here is one of the areas of life that call all of us. Even if we are pursuing Him, we can pursue Him more. I want to show you in this text two primary reasons why our life’s ambition should be to pursue Christ more.

Pursue Christ more because . . .

Christ is Worthy!

- Life without Christ is empty. (2-8)

Though his personal, professional, and even religious pedigree was impressive, Paul came to place where all of that left him empty. Now, the issue is one of comparison for Paul. His past had left him empty, but now He could not be more thankful for the life he had in Christ. The result of that comparison and exchange left him with a desire to know Christ—to pursue Christ—more!

- His righteousness becomes our righteousness. (9)

Overwhelmed by the transfer of righteousness that came through Christ, Paul desired to know Him more.

- Eternal life is ours through Christ. (10-11)

- He gives us His grace. (12)

Paul realized that all of this was God’s doing. He had “been taken hold of by Christ.”

He must pursue Christ because of who he was and whose he was.

Paul’s experience must have been similar to that of Isaac Watts who penned that grand hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

We pursue Christ because He is worthy. His love demands our souls, our lives, our all! Are you giving Him your all today? Not just your best—your all!

Compromise with the world is a constant temptation.

Paul's concern in this passage is that the believers of Philippi "press on" in their spiritual maturity. The question of the day in Philippi is, no doubt, some heretical teaching of the first century. The teaching is causing some of the believers there to be confused and even revert back to a pre-conversion lifestyle.

In our day, perhaps you have learned or experienced already, that if we are not growing in our faith, we are sliding away from the will of God. There is no such thing as just staying where you are. You are either growing in maturity or growing to some degree of complacency. You are not standing still. So, notice two things about those who stop pursuing Christ.

Notice the **Designation** of those who stop pursuing Christ in verse 18. *"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ."*

I don't think there is a lot of reason to have discussion as to whether those referred to in verse 18 or believers or unbelievers—saved or lost. It really doesn't matter for purposes of our application of this text. I happen to think that they are Christians who have become complacent and stopped pursuing Christ. The context of this passage suggests Paul's warning to "press on" or else. I think in verse 18 is the designation of some who have ceased to "press on." They are designated as enemies of the cross of Christ. You know, it is possible to be a Christian and be an enemy of the cross of Christ. You may be saved, but in fact, you are guilty of doing more harm to the cause of Christ than good.

Notice the **Description** of those who have ceased pursuing Christ in verse 19. They are described as those *"whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things."*

This list of descriptions certainly is indicative of the life of an unbeliever, but it also reflects the life of some believers.

- Whose end is destruction—Again, this doesn't have to be eternal destruction, although, eternal destruction certainly applies for the non-believer. Destruction could imply simply the awful consequences of sin that destroy a person's life.
- Whose god is their belly—Belly, here, is the idea of the flesh. These individuals are being described as doing whatever to gratify their sinful desires. They live for the pleasure of the flesh.
- Whose glory is in their shame—Some, unfortunately, are known for their sin. I could mention several prominent, national names, both recent and historical, of which your first thought would be on their sin. They have become known by their sin, not whatever good they might have otherwise done.
- Who set their mind on earthly things—The spiritually complacent are focused on earthly things instead of eternal things.

We must pursue Christ because failure to pursue Christ actually leads to compromise with the world. To use an old term, we backslide.

If you have not learned anything else from my preaching since I have been your pastor, I hope that you have learned this:

The strength of your relationship with Christ yesterday or today says nothing about the strength of your commitment tomorrow. We must press on!

So What?

Press On!

Notice the language of verse 13. It will be familiar—"this one thing I do." Keep pursuing Christ. Pursue Him more.

Let this pursuit define your . . .

1. Goals—Set as your goal the goal of Christ and pursue that goal. Realize that you are not there yet. If you think you are there, rethink that. You are not there yet.
2. Friends—Ask God to help you to find good examples and follow those examples.
3. Priorities—Re-order your priorities continually and re-visit those priorities regularly.

I'm sure many of you have heard this before, but I love the passion in this piece. Many people have their theory of its origin. I'm not sure, but since I've been to this place, I like its origin being attributed to a group of athletes attending National Fellowship of Christian Athletes Camp in Black Mountain, NC in 1966. It goes like this:

I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still.

My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotion, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, live by prayer, and labor by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no problem recognizing me...my banner will be clear!"