

# Exegesis of Philippians 3

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Clear & precise thinking is hard to achieve. Perhaps we don't realize that so much because we are often dealing with matters that are familiar to us. The closer we get to unfamiliar material, the more we appreciate thinking clearly without confusion.

Once in a while we find that our thinking on something familiar isn't as well defined as we thought. We may be unnecessarily keeping very similar things separated in our minds; or we may have always thought of two things together that do not have to be combined.

In his letter to the Philippians, and especially in the third chapter, it seems that Paul is reminding us to keep two things separate that are commonly joined together. While Paul is writing this letter from prison, the spirit of the letter is joy. He reminds his readers that imprisonment, among other things, does not remove the sources of joy that believers have. That imprisonment must have been a source of real concern for the Philippians. It probably was not the cause for rejoicing that it was for Paul as he could see what it was doing to advance the gospel. Paul, on the other hand, had his own cause for concern about the Philippians. Yet in neither case does he want them to combine the serious concern with a lack of joy or to put it another way: worry. Paul reminds then that joy is consistent with his imprisonment and also with their heeding the serious warning he gives them in what we call chapter three. It is there that we, too, find

## A Double Warning from Paul on Striving for Perfection

I Don't count on it to get to heaven (3:1-11)

A (1) Rejoice & keep that joy by observing a safeguard

B (2-6) Watch the Judaistic claims for external perfection

C (7-11) Paul threw out all the "perfection" that he had so as to have room for the real & complete perfection that only Christ offers

II Don't think you'll get there without it (3:12-4:1)

A (12-14) Paul himself keeps striving to be what Christ will finally make him

B (15&16) Don't confuse the two main points; though it may take a while to get a mature understanding of this

C (17-19) Imitate the good examples you have and don't be tricked by those who go to the other (antinomian) extreme

D (20&21) Any apparent conflict here will be settled when Jesus perfects us at the end

E (4:1) That's the reason & the way to have a good standing before the Lord

V1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is no trouble; besides, it is a safeguard for you.

*to loipon* - finally, then

*okneeros*- troublesome

*asphalees* – safe, a "safeguard"

Paul's beginning, "*to loipon*," indicates a break in thought from what he had been discussing. In a sense it is the "final" section; it is the large, serious, ending section of his letter. Lenski is not wrong when he says that it means little more than "*oun*," which he says is also the case in Greek today. Paul's adverbial accusative probably just means that he's getting down to the main thing that he wants to tell them.

As Paul begins to get serious, he reminds them of the brotherhood they have in Christ. It is in Christ, the Lord of their lives that they both can rejoice even when unbelievers would not. Joy that is real has its source in the Lord and is a good starting point even for a serious dissertation on false teaching. It is the same joy that makes it possible for Paul to keep a pleasant state of mind in discussing a topic he'd rather not have to get into. Stoeckhardt has the right idea when he translates, "I'm not reluctant to write..." Such a job would be troublesome to someone who thought that peace must be preserved in the church at any price. Paul's real love is well-channeled when he gives them advice on how to avoid a double-danger, even though it will mean that the calm will have to be broken. That's the way in which Paul can provide the necessary safeguard for his readers then and now. Moule thinks that "*humin*" and what follows may be a quote because the iambic meter is "more than unintentional." In any event, Paul has a striking way of saying that he & his believing readers are agreed already on some appropriate polemics that many would never stand for.

V2 Watch out for the dogs...watch out for the bad workmen...watch the mutilation!

*Kuoon*-dog

*Ergatees*- workman

*Katatomee*- mutilation

Paul doesn't mince any words here. He gets right on with the business at hand & calls a spade a spade. His strong language reminds one of Luther, but several commentators also point out that it's also like that of Jesus when he spoke of wolves, whited sepulchres & the devil's true children.

There's disagreement on whether the trouble-makers were already present. Lightfoot thinks that the Philippians already knew them because Paul refers to them with articles. That makes sense, but I doubt that it is conclusive. Neither is the fact that there was little commerce in Philippi & therefore few Jews. Fortunately such points matter little for the point of Paul's safeguard.

Paul first calls his Judaistic opponents dogs. This has more meaning that it would among us because the Jews commonly used the term to refer to gentiles. "*Kunarion*" was the word that Jesus had used and that apparently refers to house pets. Paul doesn't use the diminutive. He refers to the Jews as scavengers & unclean. It's under "*kuoon*" that Kittel talks about the last word in contempt.

With his next term of derision, Paul probably does not mean to say that he is talking about people who work poorly. Arndt-Gingrich shortens it to "evil-doer" & Jesus himself gives us a fuller description in Mt 23:15. "You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are." in our day the Mormons provide a good example of such bad workmen.

Paul ends his triple "watch out" with a pun on circumcision. He seizes upon the word in which his opponents take pride and uses it to their discredit. His word is sometimes used in the sense of chop off & cut into pieces as well as just to mutilate. Paul is surely not degrading the Old Testament sacrament, but he is correctly describing those who are still overdoing something which has now outlived its usefulness. No one was ever to look on circumcision as a meritorious work (as baptism is sometimes still abused), but just as a personal assurance of God's promised forgiveness. That's why Paul also had to tell the Galatians, "every man who lets himself be circumcised ... is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ" (Gal 5:3 & 4). Had they been willing to listen, Paul would have told the Judaizers themselves, "Circumcise your hearts..." (Deut 10:16). Such circumcision was not mutilation but "godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Co 7:10). Paul's cutting thoughts have an even sharper edge when they are spoken because of the assonance in the k's and t's.

V 3 For we are the circumcision, those serving God's spirit of God and boasting in (because of) Christ Jesus, not trusting in the flesh,

### *Kauchaoo*-boast

Watch out for them because they claim to be what we already are: the true circumcision. To heighten the contrast and show how completely wrong their claim was, Paul even uses the pronoun for we and puts it first in the sentence. It's easy to overlook the fact that back in verse one, Paul had been using the second person. Now he puts himself right alongside the Philippians and says not they, but we, are the circumcision. No doubt there were some among the "we" Paul is talking about that were not physically circumcised. That changes nothing. In Ro 4:11, Paul had said, "He (Abraham) is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised in order that righteousness might be credited to them."

There is a variant reading for "*theou*" in the next phrase. (This is the first variant mentioned in the UBS text. Its claim to mentioning only the significant variants seems to be valid. Nestle has many others, but they have both little support and little importance.) The "C" rating means there is a considerable degree of doubt about the reading in the text, but the variant doesn't change the sense of what Paul is saying. There are several different translations possible, but they all serve to strengthen the point that Paul is making. The KJV follows the alternate reading, "*theo*," with "worship God by the Spirit." "Worship God's Spirit" would also be possible. "Worship by the Spirit of God" is possible, too. Arndt-Gingrich likes this choice. It fits with what Paul is saying since the Spirit dwells in believers only, not in those who are concerned just about externals. In Ro 1:9, Paul says, "God, whom I worship with my whole heart ("*pneumati*") This last possibility seems to be most in favor. Moule feels that the dative "borders on instrumental and is best rendered by an adverb." He suggests "whose service is of a spiritual (and not of a material) sort." Lightfoot agrees with this and supports it by referring to Ro 9:4, "Theirs is the adoption as sons, theirs the divine glory.... the temple worship (!) and the promises." "*Latreuoo*" means to serve in a religious sense, as opposed to "*leitourgeo*," which is to perform some public service. In Ro 9:4, Paul apparently has in mind more than just any religious worship; he means the true worship. That offers good support for the contrast Paul is making. Worship that is of a spiritual sort is totally different from the external "worship" of those who merely claimed to be the true Israel.

Paul's next phrase sounds similar to II Cor 11:17, "In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would but as a fool." Lightfoot observes that what we have in Philippians is probably more subdued because it is later. He adds, however, that it is no less earnest. As Paul states, believers are always making their boast in Christ and because of what he has accomplished in our place. That is the same as saying that they do not boast or place any trust in the "flesh." The best commentary on this word is what Paul will say soon about the kinds of things that the Judaizers think should count to win the Lord's favor.

V 4 ...Although I have reason for confidence in physical matters. If someone else seems to be able to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.

*kaiper* - although

*pepoittheesis* - confidence.

*sarx* - flesh, physical matters

After Paul has made the point that all believers are the true heirs of the Old Testament, he strengthens his argument by referring to a particular believer. He refers to himself to show that the Judaizers have nothing up on him. Otherwise they might insist that Paul is talking "sour grapes" because he couldn't meet their high standards. Paul beats them to the draw and shows that such an argument would be futile. He uses "*egoo*" for emphasis not for reasons of ego, but simply to heighten the contrast.

Moule helps in understanding the unusual participial use of "*echoo*." He lists it under "semitisms." Since Hebrew has no present tense, it regularly uses the present active participle in its place. What Paul has is expressed in "*pepoittheesis*." The NIV is especially good here: "to have reason to put confidence in..." There is a big difference between having such reasons for confidence and going beyond that and also putting confidence in physical matters. Paul's line of reasoning shows he is against that. Context makes this situation quite simple. Arndt-Gingrich suggests the interpretive "in physical matters" to avoid the misunderstanding that Paul is

speaking of “*sarx*” as our sinful nature. Especially the material which Paul is about to enter as evidence makes this point obvious.

Although Paul felt that he did not deserve to be called apostle because of his previous way of life, that unfortunate way of living now serves to make a strong point. Paul states categorically that if anybody else thinks that he’s been pretty good by Judaistic standards, he can go them one better. Paul is still talking about having reason for confidence; he is not saying that his confidence in physical matters is stronger than that of the Judaizers. This rather obvious fact does help in fixing our understanding of “*pepoittheesis*” earlier.

V 5 I’m circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee in regard to the Law,

*Oktatheemeros* – on the eighth day

*genos* - nation

*phulee* - tribe

Paul now goes on to describe the reasons he has which some would regard as a sound basis for confidence in physical matters. First he is an “eight-day”r ‘in reference to’ (Blass-DeBrunner, #197) (Lenski calls it ‘relation’) circumcision.” That would have to be better than the many Judaizers who couldn’t claim circumcision at the commanded time. Paul is from the nation of Israel, not a proselyte. More Judaizers would be eliminated on this point. Not only that, but he is from the tribe of Benjamin. This meant that he was one of the real Jews from the remaining tribes after the captivity. That he is a Hebrew among Hebrews tells us that he has no non-Jewish blood. Lightfoot contends that he couldn’t say this “unless he spoke the Hebrew tongue and retained Hebrew customs.” Here John 8:9 would seem to describe the Judaizers with whom Paul was comparing himself: “And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last.”

Paul, however, isn’t finished yet. With respect to, or by the standard of law, he was a Pharisee. Lightfoot reminds us that Paul doesn’t say the law, but law, “regarded in the abstract, as a principle of action.” The same “*kata*” construction occurs twice in the next verse without the article with abstract nouns. Perhaps the lack of article here also reflects the more abstract ideas he is already thinking about. Whether Paul has a special sense in mind with law or not, he is a Pharisee, a “separatist.” In Paul’s case there was something more to this than belonging to an exclusive group. By human standards, Paul could have said, “Father I thank thee that I am not as other men are.” His keeping the law, though, was what separated him. Most of his opponents could not claim such significance in the name “Pharisee.”

V 6 In regard to zeal...persecuting the church, with respect to righteousness in the law I’ve been faultless.

*Amemptos* – Fault/blameless

Zeal is the second of Paul’s three abstract terms. It would be difficult to quantify zeal, thus there’s little question whether this is an abstraction. We can easily say, though, that Paul personified the term. While there were others who obviously were keeping up the persecution now, Paul wouldn’t have been outdone by many. The NIV translates the next idea with “legalistic righteousness.” This is finally what any Judaizer’s accomplishments would be, but the negative connotation of “legalistic” doesn’t fit well with the good-sounding law and zeal. Perhaps it is better to just say, “in strict adherence to law...”

Yet Paul is still only giving what others consider reasons for confidence. While he himself was great by their standards, he is no longer placing his own confidence in such external matters. The “*alla*” following verse 6 signals the turn in Paul’s present presentation as well as the complete change in heart that occurred after Jesus stopped him on the way to Damascus.

V 7 Yet whatever was gain for me I consider a loss for the sake of Christ.

*hostis* - ...ever

*kerdos* - gain

*zeemia* - loss

Paul covers all the preceding when he says, “Whatever gains I had have now shown up for what they really are: a total loss.” Blass-DeBrunner (#341) reminds us that the perfect of “*heegeomai*” has the force of a plain present tense. The idea apparently is that he has come to consider.... We can imagine that this is not just considered, but well considered now that Paul states it thus. Through the Spirit, Paul had come to realize that all that “good stuff” was really a wipe out, a waste of time, and even worse, a loss that tricks one into thinking that you really do have something.

Thus Article IV of the Formula of Concord, paragraph 37, warns us that “if any should wish to drag good works into the article of justification, or rest his righteousness or trust for salvation upon them, to merit God’s grace and be saved by them, to this not we say, but St. Paul himself says, and repeats it three times, Phil 3:7 ff, that to such a man his works are not only useless and a hindrance, but also injurious. But this is not the fault of the good works themselves, but of the false confidence placed in the works, contrary to the express word of God.”

V 8 More than that, I now consider everything a disadvantage for the sake of the surpassing greatness of my personal acquaintance with Christ Jesus, my Lord. For him I have forfeited everything. I consider that “crap” that I may gain Christ...

*menounge* – (rather), more than that

*zeemia* – loss, disadvantage

*dia* – because of, for the sake of

*huperechoo* – surpassing greatness

*gnoosis* – personal acquaintance

*zeemio-oo* - forfeit

*skubalon* – refuse, garbage, crap

Paul is not changing his line of thought here, as one might take from “*alla*”. Rather he is going further in the same direction. The “but” indicates that he wants to say more than what he has expressed and expand the thought because there is still more to this thought. Thus Arndt-Gingrich suggests “more than that” and the NIV has “what is more.” This is a second distinct step of a thought development which uses *heegeomai* three times. Here he uses the present to show what is his present “considered” opinion. Not only does he consider all the old supposed gains to be a loss now, but he is willing to open that thought up to everything else which could occupy his attention instead of Christ and his salvation.

The NIV suggests “loss compared to....” This is a rather interpretive translation for “*dia*” and would be a very unusual way in which to use “*dia*.” It seems to weaken Paul’s thought that in Christ there is total gain. There really is nothing to compare with it since nothing else has any value. Loss as a term for *zeemia* may be weaker than it should be, too. Recalling the quote from the fourth article of the Formula of Concord, we can see that Paul may be considering everything distracting from Christ a real disadvantage for the sake of the long-term total gain he really wants.

Those things are a disadvantage because of the surpassing greatness of what is really the apple of his eye. Paul could have used “*huperochee*” here, but he rather chose to use the neuter present participle as a noun. Blass-DeBrunner finds this “more concrete and graphic than the other. It clearly was that way in Paul’s mind and that is what he wanted to embed in the minds of his readers, too. Specifically Paul is referring to the surpassing greatness of his personal acquaintance with the Savior. This was knowledge, but the power of the gospel had made it more than that. It was a trust, too, and that was what made it personal.

For that Savior Paul had forfeited everything. The verb, “*zeemio-oo*,” is always found in the passive, but the passive usage may still have some significance for us. Paul had not chosen Christ, it was the other way around. This forfeiting became possible, too, because of the effect of the gospel on him. “Everything” is accusative because the accusative of the thing is retained with the passive construction.

The third part of Paul’s process of “consideration comes next & since it is the culmination of the three, it might be good to translate the *kai* with “in fact.” Paul expresses himself most forcefully here. To gain Christ, he says, I consider all of that “*skubala*.” Lang., in Kittel, says that literature adopted this word quite late and only with reluctance. That would fit with the idea that this is something of a four-letter word. It was used for spoiled food, scraps in general and for excrement. Lang understands Paul’s thought here when he comments, “To the degree that the law is used in self-justification, it serves the flesh and is not just worthless but noxious and abhorrent. The two elements in “*skubalon*,” namely, worthlessness and filth, are best expressed by a term like “dung.” Today the word “crap” may be best suited to the ambiguous word.

Paul uses such strong language to heighten the contrast between these dangerous distractions and disadvantages and what he does want to gain: Christ. His construction uses “*hina*” and the aorist subjunctive to express purpose. “*Kerdeesoo*” looks the same in the aorist subjunctive and the future, but the second of the two verbs following this “*hina*” is definitely aorist subjunctive so that helps here. His personal purpose is to gain Christ and his Purpose in stating this is that his readers may also gain him.

V 9 ...and be found in him, not having my own righteousness from (the) law, but that through faith in Christ. That is the righteousness from God on the basis of faith.

Paul’s next verb is a first aorist subjunctive and again expresses purpose. This is not found just in the passive case, so it indicates more strongly than “*zeemio-oo*” that salvation is strictly a matter of receiving; there is nothing that Paul thinks he will contribute. This is another important part of his warning.

While the verb itself makes this point, Paul states it in forceful words so that there can be no misunderstanding. He doesn’t claim any righteousness of his own which would be of a legal(istic) nature. Paul’s righteousness is that which is strictly through faith in Christ. Arndt-Gingrich calls the use with “*dia*” the genitive of the thing, whether means, instrument or agency. He uses two prepositional attributives to make clear just what he means. The genitive, “*Christou*,” is simply an objective genitive and reminds us that Christ is the object of our subjective faith. This is the righteousness from God. Not any intrinsic righteousness, but that earned by Christ. It is Paul’s “on the basis of” faith ... he states it again. His double mention of faith stresses “that upon which the result is based.” Arndt-Gingrich suggests that and adds “depending on, on the basis” to further show what Paul is saying. Through his many, somewhat redundant words, Paul gets it across to his readers that this is quite the opposite of all that the Judaizers were suggesting to gain righteousness. Here, again, it is either by works or by grace. No combination is possible.

V.10 (I do this) to know him, the power of his resurrection & for participation in his sufferings. I’m taking on the same for as his death...

While Paul’s sentence is unlike English in its length, its simple infinitive usage here sounds right to our English ears. Moule lists this under the result use of the infinitive, but says that it could also be purpose or epexegetical. The aorist tense indicates that Paul is thinking of something that has already happened. He has the personal acquaintance with Christ that assures him of everlasting life. He also knows about the power of Christ’s resurrection. The good news of Christ’s resurrection has the power to save all who believe. As he sits “in chains” in Rome, he has also come to share and participate in Christ’s sufferings. His sharing in this is going on at the present time and as time goes on he is taking on the same form as Christ did - death.

V 11 So that I may reach the resurrection from the dead.

Since we usually speak of the certainty of the resurrection, it seems a little strange at first to hear Paul use the word “if” in leading to the mention of his own resurrection. Blass-DeBrunner (0368 & 375) reassures us by stating that “*ei poos*” is an indirect question which expresses expectation rather than doubt. The NIV’s “and so, somehow” is very good at expressing Paul’s thought. There is no uncertainty about there being a resurrection or that he will have a part in it. The uncertainty is in regard to how he will arrive there. He didn’t know how the Lord was going to receive him. Would it be martyrdom or not. Since he was sitting in prison, it shouldn’t surprise us that he puts it this way. It would be a matter of concern for any believer under those circumstances. His words don’t express doubt, just thought about how he was going to get there. By its form, “*katanteesoo*,” could be either future or an aorist subjunctive. Paul is most likely using the subjunctive here since a clear subjunctive (“*katalaboo*”) appears in a similar construction in the next verse. Paul uses a different form of “*anastasis*” to refer to his own resurrection; the prefix “*ex*” is added. Arndt-Gingricli sees nothing in this, but Lenski asserts that it shows that while Christ’s resurrection was an active rising, Paul’s would be passive. At least the thought is unquestionable, whether Paul was saying it or not.

Paul began his first warning on a note of joy. He could hardly finish with a more joyous note than a reference to a believer’s own resurrection. While some contend that the polemic middle is out of place here, that is hardly true. Franz Pieper puts it very well in his *Dogmatik*, V. 2, pp. 506 & 507: Joy over the gracious work of God goes hand in hand with the determination to oppose those who would destroy this joy. Seeing the glorious results of the grace of God in the Philippian congregation, the apostle was moved by holy wrath against the Judaizing workmongers who imperiled the entire foundation of the Christian faith and life.”

Paul has surely made his point that a believer should not count on his own striving for perfection for the assurance that he will get to heaven. He demonstrates that point personally the more that he states that he places no stock in whatever he used to think, would be meritorious. He goes out of his way to show that by all human standards he was pretty good and if anyone could have done it, he would have. As he begins the second section of this chapter, he continues to talk about himself. That personal involvement forms the center of the chapter. What he says about himself changes, though. He has made the point that he had tried very hard and looked pretty good externally. Now finds it necessary to make a completely different point. His main emphasis now is on the danger of overreacting and complacently paying no attention to living. Such a misuse of Christian liberty from the obligation to keep the law can accomplish the same fall from grace as the first danger could. Therefore he is careful to state that he keeps on trying and striving for perfection. While he does not specifically say so, we should remember enough from his first warning that tire do not think that such striving has any merit for gaining heaven. He had been talking about his past, but what he said would apply equally to his present living. That is, no living, not even that of a believer contributes toward earning heaven. Naturally his inspired words say the same about any believer’s present living in grace. Whether a person feels that he has attained perfection or that his striving alone has merit, Paul’s first main point provides the correction needed. No work at any time serves to get anyone any closer to heaven.

Clearly that warning is needed today. We don’t have people telling us to be circumcised or to observe parts or the Old Testament, but current religious thought does “teach for doctrine the commandments of men.” only the particular “do’s” and “don’t’s” have changed, the human conviction that there must be something we can do is the same. That danger remains; fortunately Paul’s first safeguard also remains!

On the other hand, Paul’s second warning is needed, too. Even in the face of those who demanded human effort for gaining salvation, Paul admitted his inadequacy and that he found it important to keep on trying. The reason for trying is not to earn anything, but simply that it is the nature of a believer to try to improve ... to please the Savior who went all out for him. As we staunchly stand with Paul against those who tell us we must do this and that, is there any less danger for us that our insistence on not striving for perfection for the wrong reason may become a wrong laziness in striving for perfection for the right reason?!

V 12 It’s not (don’t misunderstand, I’m not saying) that I have already “got it” or already been finished; I am striving to make it my own “as” I have been made His own by Christ.

*Lambanoo*-receive, obtain, get

*Teleio-oo*- complete, finish

*dookoo* – hasten, run, pursue, strive, seek, aspire to

*katalambanoo* – seize, make one's own

Just the way that Paul begins this new section seems to indicate that he is trying to prevent a misunderstanding. Arndt-Gingrich thinks that “*elabon*” is used in a rather passive sense; particularly so since “*katalambanoo*” is used in the same verse. Perhaps our simple “get” is close to the common “*lambanoo*” in this case. The combination of the aorist with “*eedee*” reminds us that while he “hasn’t got it yet,” that time will come (sc. in heaven). There is a significant variant here. The text is UBS-rated “B,” so there is some degree of doubt about the reading in the text. There are over a half dozen different possibilities here, but the significant one is the addition of “*dedikaioomai*.” With our insistence on the forensic meaning of “*dikaio-oo*” under all circumstances, this would present a problem. Paul is surely not saying that he hasn’t been declared righteous yet. Fortunately this variant is one of the most poorly supported and is hardly worth mentioning. Paul uses the perfect passive to tell us that he hasn’t been finished yet. Perhaps this is the source for the motto, “please be patient with me, God isn’t finished with me yet.”

Since Paul finds this to be his condition, he is presently striving to correct that deficiency. Here is a use of “*ei*” in a clear expression of expectation. The NIV expresses well Paul’s striving “to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” Paul uses the stronger form of “*lambanoo*” here. It was very strongly that Christ seized Paul or made him his own, too. The doctrine of election reminds us how strongly Christ has taken hold of all his believers. The word is a good one to express such certainty. On the part of Paul, the “*katalambanoo*” expresses his great desire to attain what he’s mentioning.

“It” surely isn’t Christ, since Paul has him fully already. Stoeckhardt suggests everlasting life. Blass-Debrunner’s interpretation of “*eph hoo*” with “for the reason that” would fit with Christ’s seizing him first of all to take him to everlasting life. That’s not the only possibility, though. More precisely “it” may be the moral perfection that comes only with everlasting life. That’s what he’s been talking about all along. Moule almost suggests that with “that I may grasp that with a view to which I have been grasped.”

V13 Brothers, I do not consider myself to have attained! One thing, though, forgetting the things that are behind, I am straining ahead.

*epilanthanomai* – forget, overlook

*epekteinomai* – stretch out, strain

With his first three words, Paul draws attention to how well the Philippians knew him and the personal relationship between them. Then he stresses that he is talking about himself with the pronouns. He wants to be sure that they don’t get the idea that he is perfect or any different from “lesser” believers. He is also making sure that they know that he knows that, too. Thus they are to recognize (as should we) that no one is to figure that he has arrived at a state of sanctification where he has nothing more to strive to attain. Paul makes that clear also through his use of the infinitive in the perfect tense. There is a variant for “*ou*.” While the reading in the text is only rated C, “*oupoo*” (“not yet”) so well expresses the sense of what Paul is saying that it is probably an unwitting comment made by a copyist who is thinking along with Paul while he is making his copy.

While Paul can not say that he has reached perfection, he does boldly assert what is nonetheless true. The one thing that is true is that he is continually (present tense) forgetting what is behind. Lenski helps here by calling this “the forgetting of constant discarding.” He isn’t forgetting the beginnings of his Christian faith or life, but all the mistakes, bad moves and sins of weakness of the past. The counterpart to that is that he keeps straining for what it ahead of him that he would like to reach.



V 14 I am striving for the goal for the prize which is God's upward call in Christ Jesus

*Skopos* – goal, mark

*Diokoo* – strive for, aspire to

*Brabeion* - prize

Like his runner, Paul himself keeps striving for the goal. That goal is the real beginning; it is the point of entry into heaven. He mentions the prize and explains what it is with the exegetical genitive, the upward, heavenward, lofty calling that has been issued to all believers. In his *Schlüssel*, Rienecker calls the use of “*en*” instrumental. Jesus is the agent through whom the call was issued and Paul says that it was a call from the Father. With this thought, Paul ends his talk on striving to attain the perfection which is a believer's in full only in heaven.

V15 As many as are “finished” (mature), let us agree with this. Even if you regard something differently, God will reveal this to you,

Paul begins his new thought with a hortative, again including himself, probably for the sake of empathy. His choice of pronoun shows that he wants us to agree on what he has been writing about. “*Hode*,” on the other hand, would refer to what is to follow. While this is rather tricky to express in just a couple words, the NIV has done well with “such a view.”

He's encouraging everyone to do this, including those who find some appeal in being “*teleios*.” His use of this word seems to be a case of double-entendre. It can't be ignored that not many verses ago he was using it in the sense of “finished” or “complete” in regard to sanctification. Here he clearly intends for it to be understood differently, since he's already shown that being “*teleios*” in the previous sense is beyond all of us for the present. Perhaps he's using this word again as a reminder to all that moral perfection is unattainable for now, but that there is a more ordinary sense in which we can attain as much maturity as we are going to get here on earth. As he had said in 1 Cor 2:6, “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature....” Simply understanding and in faith accepting what Paul has written about obtaining perfection is the only full maturity that we will reach here on earth. Anyone who really is mature will take this view, Paul also says as a reminder.

Paul's next words are important to understand correctly. An easy misinterpretation would be that even if someone disagreed with him, it wouldn't matter. That doesn't fit with Paul or the fact that this must be important to follow as he has laid it out for us. If it weren't, he wouldn't have had to go to the trouble of giving such a safeguard.

Robertson, #1026, feels that here “*kai*” refers to the possibility of someone thinking differently about this as an extremely unlikely case. Nor does the difference in thinking have to be a major difference. Lenski feels that because of Paul's greater experience with and depth of insight into the Judaizers and their teachings that “perhaps they (the Philippians) might differ in some respect regarding Paul's experience and its exact meaning for them.” With this phrase Paul is evidently expressing his concern for those believers who might not yet fully grasp all that he has been saying. Kretzmann says that “since the language used by Paul might discourage those that are weak in knowledge, he hastens to add that, in case one still thinks differently about the matter, God will reveal it to him also.” It is probably best to keep in mind the possibility of such weakness in evaluating Lightfoot's translation of “*amiss*” instead of “differently.” Paul may not have wanted to say “*amiss*” because he was thinking only about weak believers and not confirmed errorists. In John 7:17, Jesus also said, “If any one chooses (‘wants’ would be a better word here) to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” Jesus, too, is saying that it might not come all at once. Lenski states that “our constant experience is that even we mature Christians see many a point more clearly as time and our own personal experience go on.”

Some, naturally, will look for reassurance here for immediate revelation. It might be true, even as late as Paul wrote to Philippi, that the Pentecost gift was still being repeated. That idea is not in place here, though. When an obviously important issue is under discussion, Paul does not direct his readers to find their answers elsewhere or through some immediate source. Such thinking ignores the easy explanation and stretches Paul's sentence beyond the breaking point.

V 16 Except let's hold on to what we have attained

*phthanoo* – come up to, reach, attain

*pleen* – only, however, except that

*stoicheoo* – hold to, stand beside

Verse 16 is the final one in this section and Paul ends here with just a parting thought. "Just hang on to what you have." His thought seems to be that everyone is to keep the central thought of the gospel in mind, no matter how much else they may or may not understand. His command is in the form of an imperatival infinitive. There's another variant here, but the text reading is rated "B." There are several different variants, but the main one uses "*phroneoo*" in place of "*stoicheoo*." "Think..." may be weaker than "hold on to...", but the meaning is very similar. Another variant includes "*kanoni*," "rule" or "principle," but this is pretty much implied by Paul already. It is probably a later addition. That there are so many variants, with the text reading having the most support makes one think that the text is probably correct. In any case there is hardly any difference. The NIV's "live up to" for "*stoicheoo*" is possible, but it doesn't seem to fit as well with Paul's line of thought. It is also a lesser meaning of "*stoicheoo*." Since he's been talking about degrees of understanding of what he has presented, it seems more likely that he is concluding with a warning against the gospel itself being lost. Verse 17 begins the new section on encouragement for living and punctuation supports that division. Even the NIV's paragraph division goes along with that. "*Pleen*" also draws this command back to the preceding thought of holding to sound teaching.

V 17 Join together in following my example, brothers, and keep your eyes on those who live as you have an example in us.

*skopeoo*- look for, notice, keep eyes on

*peripateoo* – walk, live, conduct self

Paul had been telling the Philippians how he kept trying for perfection in living (for the right reason, of course) and he now encourages them to follow that as an example. It probably is not that he is telling them to become imitators; he would assume they already are to some extent. His present tense carries the thought that they are to continue what they're already doing and to get better at it. Lightfoot suggests the idea of competition here, but Lenski is probably closer to Paul with "aid and support each other in imitating me." The NIV's "join with others" perhaps could better be "join together..."

Paul tells them to keep their eyes on some people. Arndt-Gingrich suggests "Notice those who conduct themselves thus." In humility Paul concludes the thought with a switch to the plural instead of referring just to himself again. While he wants them to have sound teaching, he reminds them "...und das andere nicht lassen." He is concerned that they not fall off the other side of the horse by neglecting Christian living for the correct reason.

V 18 (Do that) Since there are many who, I often told you before and now I'm saying it even with tears (!), are living as enemies of Christ's cross.

Paul's "*polloi*" reminds the Philippians that his warning is about a point where many do fail, His "*gar*" shows that he is now explaining why he wants them to follow the good examples that they have. There are as

many and more who are not providing good examples by the way they conduct themselves. By using both “*pollakis*” and the imperfect, Paul is freely admitting to them that they have heard this from him repeatedly. These are not the enemies of the cross that he originally warned them about, As Lightfoot puts it, these are the “antinomian reactionists.” Those who live as Paul is describing here are an offense to believers and also provide fuel for the fire of Judaistic teaching. Paul has ample reason for repeated warnings against them, too.

V 19 Their end is ruin, but their god is themselves and their glory is in what causes their shame; they’re thinking about purely earthly things.

*Apooleia* – destruction, haste, ruin

*koilia* – stomach, self

*epigeios* – earthly, i.e. purely human

It is because of the special danger associated with these people that Paul describes them in an unmistakable way for the Philippians. They end up ruined. The NIV’s use of “destiny” for *telos* is not so good because of the common misunderstanding about predestination. Instead of worshiping the Savior, they have their own god...literally. “*Koilia*” refers to stomach and by transfer to self. In an essay at the 1956 Minnesota Pastoral Conference, Kowalke wrote, “The *koilia* in Old Testament use especially, is the seat of the natural emotions and sentiments and appetites. Those things in the world that have a strong appeal to the natural likes and dislikes and enthusiasms of man stir feelings and emotions in the “*koilia*.” In short Paul is saying that theirs is a natural religion. As they observe what are really their own commands, they are serving no one but themselves. Lenski has an interesting and helpful observation about the nature of false teaching in this connection. “Error is not merely intellectual. The intellect is only its tool. its source is ‘the flesh,’ the depravity in us (“*koilia*”). Every error enslaves us to our own lower nature and lets that dictate as god.

As these errorists have things switched around in respect to who they are serving, they are equally mixed up about what is a real source of glory. They point to something which is not Christ’s righteousness and are proud of what they have. In essence, though, they only have something of which to be ashamed. While Paul doesn’t say so in so many words here, his great glory is in the cross. Outwardly that would seem to give only shame. Yet it gives him and all believers real glory. Their outward glory amounts to something shameful when its real nature is seen. “All human righteousness is as filthy rags,” no matter how religious and fine in appearance it may be to man.

Paul puts it another way at the end of the verse. All their protests to the contrary, they are really thinking about things that are earthly in nature. Lofty as it all may sound, such thought and living never gets off the ground. Here, especially, it is true that “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Is 55:9.

V 20 Our citizenship, though, is in heaven, from where we also eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*politeuma* – (Place of) citizenship

*huparchoo* – exist, (really) be found, be present

*apekdechomai* – eagerly await

It is the placement of Paul’s personal pronoun at the beginning of this verse that shows us that he has a great contrast in mind between what he has now finished describing and what is coming. Because the Spirit has worked in our hearts, we are not stuck here on earth. Our place of citizenship lies in the heavens. The important thing for us, then, is not earthly subject matter, but the Savior whom we eagerly anticipate from our homeland. In Paul’s construction, “*sooteera*” is predicative; we expect him to come as our Savior. The kind of final saving that he will do comes in the next verse.

V 27 He will change the form of our humble body to be like his glorious body through the power that enables him to subdue everything to himself.

*metascheematizoo* – change form of, transform

*tareinoosis* - humiliation

*summorphos* – having same form or appearance

The whole chapter has been about changing from a sin-scarred way of life to a more righteous form. Paul gives the truth again here and emphasizes who will be making that change by the prominent position of the pronoun referring to Christ. He is the one who will transform the body (and the earthly way of living associated with it at present) which we have. The exegetical genitive of the noun reminds us of gross humiliation which largely explains earthly life. With his power Jesus will change this body to be one like what he has, characterized only by glory in every form and detail. He'll do that by virtue of the power by which he can overcome everything. There is a variant reading for "*autoo*," which is read. "B." Both possibilities with rough breathing occur, though neither is well supported. The reflexive would be used in classical grammar, but the plain pronoun became common later. Paul's articular infinitive is exegetical and tells us that he alone can overcome our inability to reach perfection. That is the final word on how a believer is finally going to reach perfection.

4:1 Brothers whom I love & long for, my pride and joy, for this reason, in this way, stand in the Lord, you whom I love.

*epipotheetos* – longed for, desired

*chara* – cause, object of joy

*stephanos* – wreath, crown, adornment, prize

*steekoo* – stand firm

Lenski suggests "Bearing these things in mind" to get the sense of the word Paul uses to conclude his treatise. Even in prison, then, he loves these people and longs to be with them, too. That is also the reason that he has written this way to them. He wants them to remain his cause of joy and the crown which gives him pleasure. Therefore he tells them that this is the only way to have a firm standing. It is firm because it is on the solid foundation of Christ and the work he has done. Inspired by the Spirit, Paul expresses his love and joy in these people from beginning to end. If it is evident because he says so explicitly, it is no less so because he has given them and us a safeguard without which his love would do anyone little good.