

Philippians

Lesson #13, Chapter 3:15-21

God's Word has treasures upon its surface, but often precious gems must be dug out and examined so they can be enjoyed. Philippians chapter 3 contains many such sections and this lesson is no different. As you prepare to study this book, take time to ask the Lord for His help and a willingness to gain His mind in your studying.

1. Our passage is fairly straightforward, but there are a few sections we need to consider carefully to gain the full impact of Paul's teaching. Let's do a bit of review to get us in place and ready. First, in Philippians 3:8-11, what does Paul desire above all things?
2. Next, in Philippians 3:12 what does Paul mean when he says, "Not that I have already obtained *it*?" See Philippians 3:10-11 and verse 21 for your answer.
3. What does Paul press on to do in Philippians 3:12? What does Paul mean when he says, as the ESV puts it, "I press on to make it my own because Christ has made me His own?" See also 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Titus 2:11-14.
4. What is one way Paul intends to apply that will help him press on to his goal? See Philippians 3:13.
5. What surprising bit of information does Paul convey at the beginning of Philippians 3:13?

6. Paul reiterates the motivating goal of his life in Philippians 3:14. What is it? See also 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

7. With Paul's previous words fresh in our minds, we're now ready to tackle our passage for this lesson. What command are we given in verse 15?

8. What are we to imitate? To what is Paul referring in his command from verse 15? For sure, your answer should include verse 14, though you may consider Paul's command reaches to include verses 12-14.

9. Paul uses different forms of the *same* Greek word in Philippians 3:12 and 3:15. The NASB translated the word as *perfect* for both verses, while the ESV, NKJV, and NIV chose to translate the word in Philippians 3:12 as *perfect* and in Philippians 3:15 as *mature*. The reason for this translation difference can be found in the context of the passage. To whom is the command addressed in Philippians 3:15?

10. What distinction in thought is exposed in verse 15?

11. Why is it completely reasonable to expect believers, especially mature and maturing believers, to have Paul's same attitude? See John 15:8, 16; Romans 7:4; Ephesians 4:14-16; Titus 3:14.

12. What should the mature and maturing believers continue to do according to verse 16?

13. What seems absolutely clear from Paul's comments is that there's no going backward or regressing for those whose goal is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. What words or phrases does Paul use in this section that underscore that attitude? See verses 12-16. What else do we glean from the following verses? See 1 Corinthians 15:58; Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 10; 2 Peter 1:5-10; 3:18.

14. What is Paul instructing believers to do in verse 16? As you consider your answer, review Paul's comments in verse 12, which will help you put your thoughts together. For some examples, you can refer to Philippians 1:27; 1 Timothy 4:12; James 1:2-4.

15. Not only does Paul desire all believers to have an attitude of pressing on toward the goal while maintaining and progressing in their walk with the Lord, what else does he urge us to do in verse 17?

16. What do you learn in verse 17 about *your* role in the body of Christ?

17. Paul contrasts the way true believers walk with another group. Who are they and how do they walk? See verses 18-19.

18. Define *appetite* [Strong's #2836 (ESV, NKJV *belly*; NIV *stomach*)]. See also Matthew 6:31-33; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Peter 4:3.

19. For a fun exercise, take the description about the unbelievers from verses 18-19 and instead tailor those verses to describe believers. For example, "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even *rejoicing* that they are *friends* of Christ..."

20. What do we learn about believers from verse 20?

21. Define *citizenship* [Strong's #4175]. See also Ephesians 2:19; Hebrews 12:22-23; Revelation 21:10-27.

22. What do you learn about being a *citizen* from verse 20?

"Paul reminds them of one great truth: 'Our citizenship', he says, 'is in heaven.' Here was a picture the Philippians could understand. Philippi was a Roman colony. Here and there at strategic military centres, the Romans established their colonies. In such places, the citizens were mostly soldiers who had served their time—twenty-one years—and who had been rewarded with full citizenship. The great characteristic of these colonies was that, wherever they were, they remained fragments of Rome. Roman-style clothes were worn; Roman magistrates governed; Latin was spoken; Roman justice was administered; Roman morals were observed. Even in the most remote regions, they remained unshakably Roman. Paul says to the Philippians: 'Just as the Roman colonists never forget that they belong to Rome, you must never forget that you are citizens of heaven; and your conduct must match your citizenship.'" ~William Barclay¹

¹ William Barclay, *The Letters to Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 3rd ed. fully rev. and updated, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 81.

23. Another reason why we wait for and eagerly anticipate the Lord's return is given in verse 21, which is a fulfillment of Philippians 3:11. What will happen according to verse 21? See also 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 48-54; 2 Corinthians 5:2-4, 8; Philippians 1:21.
24. From this passage, we see that there is one thing that all believers have in common. What is it? See 1 Corinthians 1:7-8; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13; 1 John 3:2.
25. Remember, Paul was writing from prison to a church that was experiencing intense pressure, conflict, and trouble from all sides. Review the soul-refreshing truths from Philippians 3:12-21 and list the truths you find encouraging to think about in your own times of trouble.

“Paul mentions particularly that the believer will receive a glorified body, like the body of Christ. Today we live in a “body of humiliation” (which is the meaning of the word translated “vile” in Phil. 3:21); but when we see Christ, we will receive a body of glory. It will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! (1 Cor. 15:42–53) At that moment, all the things of this world will be worthless to us—just as they ought to be, relatively, today! If we are living in the future tense, then we will be exercising the spiritual mind and living for the things that really matter.” ~Warren Wiersbe²

“Here is a precious truth for thee, believer. Thou mayest be poor, or in suffering, or unknown, but for thine encouragement take a review of thy “calling” and the consequences that flow from it, and especially that blessed result here spoken of. As surely as thou art God’s child today, so surely shall all thy trials soon be at an end, and thou shalt be rich to all the intents of bliss. Wait awhile, and that weary head shall wear the crown of glory, and that hand of labour shall grasp the palm-branch of victory. Lament not thy troubles, but rather rejoice that ere long thou wilt be where “there shall be neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”³ ~Charles Spurgeon

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 93–94.

³ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening: Daily Readings, Complete and unabridged*; New modern edition. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006). May 28th, Morning.