

Week 7 (Oct 22–28): Choose Joy by Persevering! **Philippians 3:12–4:1**

The Christian life is a purpose-filled life. We do not live aimlessly, as though we are saved and now wandering around trying to be a good person until Jesus comes back. Instead, we are on a pursuit of looking more like Jesus each and every day. Why? Because we know this pursuit will lead to the most fulfilling, satisfying and joy-filled life.

Without this clear vision, Christian perseverance seems arbitrary and pointless. But with a clear vision, that a life in Christ is a purpose-filled life, we should want nothing other than Jesus, no matter what may come our way. This is the essence of Christian perseverance. We must learn to enjoy our salvation by holding tightly to salvation. We choose a life of joy by persevering. In Philippians 3:12–4:1, Paul provides at least five truths about perseverance:

Perseverance Is REQUIRED

Philippians 3:18–19; 4:1

For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.... Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

Paul says with tears that there are many enemies of Jesus and they are opposed to our becoming like Jesus. Without Christ, they succeed. The enemy will tempt, distract, lie, cheat and do everything in his power to stop our Christian pursuit. But we need to remember that the world can't make good on their offers of life. Their end? Destruction. Their god? Their insatiable appetite. Their glory? Shame. Their focus? Fleeting earthly gain.

This is why every Christian is called to persevere in the Christian life. We must learn to stand firm against these forms of opposition (see the Armor of God in Ephesians 6:10–20).

Perseverance Is DEPENDENT on Jesus

Philippians 3:12, 15–16

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.... ¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of

things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Our ability to stand firm is dependent on God's equipping us to stand firm. Paul says that he has not arrived at or attained his goal. What is the goal? We have to go back to verses 10–12 from last week: To know Christ in a past, present and future kind of way! Paul is driving toward his perfected final state and he knows that won't happen in this life. Therefore, Paul's urging is not for perfection, but perseverance, to press on to take hold of that which Christ has already taken hold of.

Because Jesus has already taken hold of us, we are able and called to take hold of Him. Our ability to persevere is on Jesus first taking hold of us. We are saved and transformed, not into perfection, but into pursuing and being conformed into His likeness. Christian perseverance is like a two-sided coin. One side of the coin declares Christ's taking hold of us in salvation. The other side of the coin declares that because He is holding us, we will persevere in obedience. There's a sense to where the goal has not been fully attained (v. 12), but they are to cling to what has been attained (v. 16). Christ has saved and Christ will save: Be dependent on Him!

Perseverance Is a Work of GRACE

Philippians 3:13–14

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

We need to remember that for Paul, forgetting what was behind was a tall order considering his persecution of Christians. But his example should also give us hope. God's grace and forgiveness is sufficient to cover whatever is in our past. This forgiveness is not because we don't deserve judgment, or we somehow deserve forgiveness. Rather, we forget it because we look to the power of Christ and His resurrection rather than our own ability.

The enemy wants us to linger in our sin and then on our sin. In other words, he wants us to keep on sinning and then keep on reflecting on the sins committed. But don't minimize the call to find forgiveness and grace in your perseverance. The reality of Romans 6:1–2 remains: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" But we

must learn to hold this in tension with our call to seek forgiveness and grace by pressing on in Christian perseverance.

Perseverance Is a Call to IMITATION

Philippians 3:17

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

Paul says, “Imitate me!” In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul says something similar, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” Like we discussed in session two, we learn from the examples of others. Paul was a man of spiritual discipline. He said to Timothy, “Train yourself in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:7–8). These disciplines don’t save the individual but are how we can train like Paul to persevere in our faith.

Spiritual discipline should never lead to legalism and self-reliance. Rather, disciplines like Bible reading, biblical community, and prayer help encourage us and help us stay connected with God so that we are able to stand firm in perseverance.

Perseverance Is a call to Remember Your CITIZENSHIP

Philippians 3:20–21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Jesus is the object of our faith. He is our hope and we know He is better than any other pursuit in life. By following Jesus, we are granted citizenship into the Kingdom of God, to live under His perfect rule and reign (see also Ephesians 2:19 and 1 Peter 2:11–12). If our purpose as Christians is to cling to what Jesus has already attained for us in salvation and hope for what will come in salvation, then these final verses are a great comfort for us when the world around us goes crazy.

Perseverance naturally assumes friction. But like Hebrews says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the

cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hb 12:1–3).

Discussion Questions:

- How would you define “the goal” that Paul is striving towards?
- Paul was a “one thing” guy (v.13). What would people who know you well say is your “one thing”?
- Verse 16 challenged the church to “live up to what we have already attained”?
 - What did Paul mean?
 - What implication does it have that it was written in the plural?
 - How does it apply to us today?
- How did Paul view those who were “enemies of the cross”? What can we learn from his example?
- What are essentials to persevering as a Christian?
- Who are godly people in your life you want to imitate?
- How should you live, knowing that someone might be wanting to imitate your perseverance?

