

Philippians 3:12-21

An Optical Illusion: We've all noticed that things that are closer to us seem bigger than things that are far away. The molehill up close really can appear much bigger than the mountain in the distance. The puddle or pond right in front of us may seem huge compared to the thin strip of ocean that we see a glimpse of along the horizon.

An Optical Illusion, Spiritually Speaking: In the same way some things that seem so important to us now are really minor, fleeting things. Yet heaven, our real home and the place that gives life on earth its meaning, may hardly enter our thoughts compared with daily errands, minor irritations or earthly pursuits. These closer things are much easier for us to focus on. They may look much bigger, but how important are they in light of eternity? In the section of Philippians, Paul explains how we can avoid falling for this trick that the world plays on our spiritual eyesight.

- I. Keep running toward the goal of a godly life. 3:12-16
- II. Stay focused on the promise of a perfect homeland. 3:17-21

Once we grasp that our real home is in heaven, we're free to pursue God's will for us here on earth.

- I. Keep running toward the goal of a perfect life. 3:12-16

3:12 **not ... attained, or ... perfected** "The meaning here is, I do not pretend to have attained to what I wish or hope to be." (Barnes)

The Christian life is like running a marathon; as long as we're still here on earth, we can be sure that we haven't yet arrived. But the fact that we haven't arrived doesn't mean that we quit, saying it's hopeless. Rather, it means that we have to keep on running.

But I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Christ laid hold of Paul for a reason: For Paul to lay hold of the prize – a godly life, an intimate knowledge of Christ Himself, a life totally pleasing to God. Paul was as close to gaining that prize as anyone, but he didn't have it yet. Therefore, he kept striving to move forward in his walk with the Lord.

Paul draws a parallel with athletics. He wants us to sense the intensity with which the runners drive themselves toward the goal, the mental focus, muscles straining, energy being exerted.

Phil 3:13-14 (ESV) ... But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal...

3:13-14 As Christians we need to strive for perfection. Jesus said it like this:

Matt 5:48 NKJV Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

At the same time, we can't pretend to be sinless. The sin that harasses and hampers us needs to be acknowledged and continually dealt with.

1Jn 1:8-9 NKJV⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

forgetting those things which are behind Dwelling on the past absorbs time and energy that should be devoted to God in the present. We need to look forward.

reaching forward—stretching forward. Think of a race again. It's like a runner with body bent forward.

3:14 **I press toward the goal**—of finishing the race.

for the prize—In the Grecian games the winner's prize was a wreath; in the Christian race the prize is eternal treasure – a closer walk with Jesus right now and a life of further blessing hereafter. The point is to keep striving for that life of perfect godliness.

First Corinthians 9:24-27 NKJV ²⁴Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. ²⁵And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. ²⁶Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Each of us has a similar heavenly calling. This calling was not just for Paul and the other apostles but is a call of encouragement for every Christian.

3:15-16 The goal is greater Christian maturity, but to the extent that we reach any level of maturity at all, we can see that we need to keep reaching for greater levels of perfection.

To the degree that we have already attained, let us walk Some versions don't have the rest of this verse. Apparently it is not in all the manuscripts. For example:

Php 3:16 ESV Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Php 3:16 NLT ¹⁶But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

Without a going into a big discussion about manuscripts, I personally like the way these other English versions read. Here's why: God will continually reveal new things to us. Still, that doesn't excuse us for taking lightly the things that we already know. We should be careful that we are living according to the truth that we already have.

Let us walk—The Greek word means “let us keep in step with” The word is more used for marching than for a simple “walk”. Our lives need to be in step or in keeping with the knowledge we already have. This is where I most often fall short, and I suspect that many of you do the same. We know what we are supposed to do; we just don't always live up to that standard. Let's be sure to keep in step with the knowledge that God has given us. The we will be able to say with Paul:

Second Timothy 4:6-8 NKJV ⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Once we grasp that our real home is in heaven, we're free to pursue God's will for us here on earth.

- II. Stay focused on the promise of a perfect homeland. 3:17-21
- 3:17 It was Paul's ambition to be Christlike. Because of that, he didn't hesitate to have others look to him for a living example of life lived to the glory of God.

First Corinthians 11-1 NKJV *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

Paul's point is not to draw attention only to himself. He also points out others "who so walk". More mature Christians give us a living example of what it means to live the Christian life.

- 3:18-19 Sadly, there are also plenty of negative examples out there. The **enemies of the cross** could be the Judaizers of v.2 or "worldly" people in general. I think the latter is the case.

Paul points out four things that are true of people such as this:

- A. Their destiny is final judgment (**destruction**).
- B. They worship themselves (**their belly**). They serve nothing but their own bodily appetites.
- C. Their glory is in their shame. That is, they glory in things of which they ought to be ashamed. They are proud of things which they should really find embarrassing.
- D. They are consumed with **earthly things**. They "live to obtain them. Their attention is directed to honor, gain, or pleasure, and their chief anxiety is that they may secure these objects." (Barnes) These are not heavenly-minded people.

Now Paul will explain why our lives ought to be different.

- 3:20 Philippi prided itself on being a Roman colony, offering the honor and privilege of Roman citizenship. He reminds the congregation that they should look to Christ, not Caesar, for their model of behavior, since their primary allegiance is to God and his kingdom.

Illustration: Our girls were born when we lived overseas. So we obtained birth certificates for them, issued by the State Dept., that say: "Consular Report of a Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States of America." In the same way the Philippians were citizens of Rome even though they lived hundreds of miles away from that city.

Roman citizenship was highly prized during Paul's time; how much more our citizenship in heaven should be valued.

- 3:21 **transform** perhaps even, "transfigure", the same word used for the transformation the apostles saw in Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Our lowly body—or "the body of our humiliation".

That it may be conformed When Christ returns for the church He will give us new bodies similar to His own.

Php 3:21 NLT *He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.*

The transformation of the soul is a lifelong process; the transfiguration of the body is instantaneous, but will not happen until the day that Christ returns.

1Jn 3:2 NKJV ²*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*

Conclusions:

Christian Perfectionism: Be careful of any teaching that claims we can reach perfection in this life. Every so often this wind of doctrine blows through churches and troubles some people who then feel they can't measure up. There are those who believe this, but it just doesn't fit with Paul's idea that he had not yet arrived in the Christian life. Paul is not just being modest; he is drawing attention to the profound truth that we are all in the midst of the process of Christian growth.

An Optical Illusion, Spiritually Speaking: Again, some things that seem so important to us now are really minor, fleeting things. We need to let heaven set our priorities. Closer things are much easier for us to focus on; they look so big. Nonetheless, we need to seriously examine everything in light of eternity. How much importance are we placing on things that will never last? How much attention are we giving to things that will matter eternally?

The way to avoid being deceived is this:

- Keep running toward the goal of a godly life. 3:12-16
- Stay focused on the promise of a perfect homeland. 3:17-21

"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this." (C.S. Lewis)

"Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither." (C.S. Lewis)

Once we grasp that our real home is in heaven, we're free to pursue God's will for us here on earth.

We shall be changed:

First Corinthians 15:51-53, 58 NKJV ⁵¹*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—* ⁵²*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* ⁵³*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

He goes on to say:

⁵⁸*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

Paul doesn't use the promise of our transformation to tell us that this life doesn't matter. Rather he uses it as the motivation for making our lives count right now.