

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

And the Winner Is...!

Sometimes when the lottery gets so high that the news media begins announcing the amount, I start dreaming, ‘I could do this or that if I won the lottery.’ But, then I think, ‘Oh wait! I won’t win because I have never purchased a lottery ticket.’ I am not advocating buying lottery tickets. I am just saying that in order to win any contest, the first thing to do is enter. I am not a gambler. I love a ‘sure thing’ and the sure way to win is by placing our faith and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

In his letters, Paul uses many illustrations from the world to communicate truth about the Christian life. In today’s passage, Paul uses athletics. Warren Wiersbe says that Bible students are not agreed on the exact sport Paul is describing – it’s either the footrace or the chariot race. Wiersbe prefers the picture of the chariot race. He writes, “The Greek chariot, used in the Olympic Games and other events, was really only a small platform with a wheel on each side. The driver had very little to hold on to as he raced around the course. He had to lean forward and strain every nerve and muscle to maintain balance and control the horses.” As we run our spiritual race, we cling to Christ.

Don’t make the mistake of concluding that the race itself is a means to gain citizenship in heaven. Our citizenship there comes from accepting the work that Christ has done on our behalf here. Our heavenly citizenship is not based on anything we do. In order to participate in the Greek games, the athletes had to be citizens **first**. Racing was not a pathway to citizenship. Because we are already the children of God through faith in Christ, our desire to run the race is for the purpose of hearing the words spoken to us by Christ in the winners’ circle, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant’. In our study today, we will discover some of the racing rules for the amazing race (and I am not talking about the television show)!

Read Philippians 3:12-14 (ESV) ¹² *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* ¹³ *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,*

Webster’s Dictionary defines the word, ‘perfect’ as being without fault or defect. Only Jesus the Son of God is able to fulfill this textbook definition of perfection. Perfection as Paul wrote of it is spiritual wholeness or completeness.

As we studied last week, Paul had the ‘perfect’ Jewish resume. By the time he wrote this letter to the Philippians, he had already completed many laps in his amazing race. But, those past works did not cause him to be satisfied with his works for Christ. Paul’s heart’s desire was to press on in the race in Jesus’ name. In fact, the first rule of the race is to **keep pressing on**. Stay faithful and persevere even when your strength is failing.

One hindrance to pressing on comes when we look back on the race. Recall what happened when Lot and his family were racing out of Sodom and Gomorrah in **Genesis 19:26 (ESV)** ²⁶ *But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked*

back, and she became a pillar of salt. If it is our heart's desire to press on in the race we must forget the past and look forward. Paul was following the instructions of Jesus in **Luke 9:62 (ESV)**⁶² ... *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* There are two parts to the racing rule of not looking back.

Part 1 – Don't hinder your race by looking back on past already confessed sins. **Psalm 103:12 (ESV)**¹² *as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.* When we confess our sins, Jesus removes those sins. Give them up and let them go.

Part 2 – Don't hinder your race by looking back on past accomplishments. Follow the example of Jesus, who only said, *"It is finished"* when He had completed His race by giving His life on the cross for us. Neither is our race for the Lord finished until we have uttered our last breath.

Another racing rule is to avoid self-satisfaction. Being self-satisfied will slow us down. Never make race comparisons to other runners. Paul had not arrived at perfection when compared to Christ but he had reached perfection in his maturity.

Read Philippians 3:15-16 (ESV)¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*¹⁵ *Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.*¹⁶ *Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

In 2019, the horse Maximum Security became the first horse to be disqualified in the history of the famed Kentucky Derby. It happened when Maximum Security was first called the winner only to be disqualified later for veering into the path of other horses. It is not enough to run hard and win the race; the winner must also obey the rules.

In the Greek games, the judges were very strict. Any infringement of the rules disqualified the athlete. He did not lose his citizenship (though he disgraced it), but he did lose his privilege to participate and win a prize. Paul in verses 15 and 16 reminds us to follow the spiritual rules laid down in God's Word. It is human nature to take the attitude that rules are made to be broken but that is never the case with God's rules.

1. **Remember you are not running alone!** Look around at the winners! **Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)**¹ *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...* The example of those who have run the race previously should encourage and comfort us. These people are not necessarily witnessing what we are doing at the moment; however, they are bearing witness *to us* that God can see us through. Also, the presence of others running the race with us now is reassuring. **1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)**¹¹ *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.* And, most important, no matter how a child of God feels in the moment, we have His promise to never leave us alone. **Deuteronomy 31:6 (ESV)**⁶ *Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."*
2. **Throw off the sin that entangles.** **Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)** *...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.* Ironsides comments,

“There is no saint so holy but that he realizes he has certain tendencies, which if allowed to control him, would lead to the breakdown of his testimony.”

3. **Look to Jesus.** *Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)* ² *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Another rule is to use what we have learned. Paul teaches that running the race is an upward call – a high calling as the King James describes it. We have been called to God’s great salvation. It is not a horse race. It is not a foot race – it is a race against time, the devil and the pleasures of this world to do our part in winning the lost to Christ.

There are rewards for running. Yes, there are going to be rewards in heaven. Scripture reveals that crowns are even available: the victor’s crown, the crown of rejoicing or the soul winner’s crown, the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, and the crown of glory or shepherd’s crown. And, the Lord Himself will be our chief Reward.

Now back to those racing rules! Paul taught that God’s children should use the spiritual lessons we’ve learned. Recall the times you fell on your knees and beseeched the Lord. Do it again. Recall the times you’ve been thrilled by a song. Let your heart sing again. Remember when you felt the Holy Spirit in worship. Let the Spirit take control again. Remember when Jesus forgave you of your sins and then forgive someone who has wronged you. Learn from the past, and use it in the present to strive toward the future.

Read *Philippians 3:17-19 (ESV)* ¹⁷ *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.* ¹⁸ *For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.* ¹⁹ *Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*

Was Paul being egotistical when he called for the Philippians to follow him? No. He wanted the Philippians to carefully choose their role models. I think Paul’s intentions may be better understood in ***1 Corinthians 11:1-2 (ESV)*** ¹ *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* ² *Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.*

When we are honest, we admit we all have role models. Setting a Christian example is critical for parents of children during their formative years. But, setting a good example is not limited to children.

It is a fact of life that the world scrutinizes Christians. Just like the cameras on the traffic lights and doorbells, others are watching what we do. Will our influence be worthy of Christ? OR, is the example of YOU and the example of ME serving as a big turnoff to others. We should not only be concerned with our influence on non-believers but believers as well.

Paul grabs our attention when he says *their god is their belly*. The mention of the belly is a reference to self-gratification. Enemies of the cross worship themselves. They think, “my god is me!”

Nowadays when we turn on the news, watch a television program or view ads, we constantly see people glorying in things of which they should be ashamed. Sadly, even Christians are becoming so accustomed to sin that it barely seem like sin anymore. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he warned him that in the latter times consciences will be seared. **1 Timothy 4:2**. Take heed that your conscience does not become seared meaning ruined like a piece of cloth when touched with a too hot iron.

Read Philippians 3:20-21 (ESV) ²⁰ *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,* ²¹ *who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

Ironside explains Paul's comments on citizenship this way: At the time of this letter, Philippi was a Roman colony. Roman citizenship had been granted as a mark of special favor to all the free-born citizens of the former Macedonian capital. Citizenship was considered a great privilege. It enabled each Philippian, though dwelling in Macedonia, to say proudly, 'My citizenship is in Rome.' He was responsible to the emperor, not to the provincial government of Macedonia.

The Philippians' Roman citizenship pictures the Christian's citizenship in heaven. Even though we are saved by the matchless grace of Jesus and living in His commonwealth or earthly kingdom, the government to which we owe our first allegiance—is in Heaven. We are subject directly to the Lord Jesus Christ, and our conduct (race rules) are to be regulated by His Word.

When we sum up Christ's return, two things stand out - the certainty of the event and the uncertainty of the time. All Christians agree we should always be in anticipation of His return. Bible scholars point out that the earthly body is not suited to heaven until a transformation takes place.

At His coming, the first resurrection will take place; the sleeping saints will be raised and living saints will be changed. **1 Corinthians 15:53 (ESV)** ⁵³ *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*

The lowly body we have now links us to earth, a body common to both saint and sinner. At the Lord's return the saints' bodies will be transformed and made like the body of Jesus' glory when He resurrected from the dead.

Ironside says, the natural body is really a body suited to the soul. A spiritual body is a body suited to the spirit. It is not that one is material and the other immaterial. Both are material, although the spiritual body is of finer substance than the mortal body and no longer subject to certain laws by which the natural body is controlled. **1 John 3:2 (ESV)** ² *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*