

# Philippians

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## Philippians 3:15-21

### Intro

- Paul ends the first section of chapter 3 looking again at his own life. I suppose if you believe you are nearing the end of your life it would be hard not to reflect. In vs. 12 he uses the word *teleios*, a Greek word we translate as “perfect” but it really means more like mature, grown up, complete. The early church used the word to refer to martyrs. In common Greek language it might be used to refer to a master craftsman as opposed to an apprentice.
- So Paul says he is not yet *teleios*, but that he has his eye on it like a runner coming down toward the finish line has his eye on the tape. He has grabbed on to the goal Christ Himself laid on to: being faithful to the will of the Father all the way to death and thus fulfilling the purpose for which he was called.

### Vss. 15-16

- As much as Paul loved the Philippian church and praised it up and down, the church still was comprised of people, so it wasn’t perfect. Paul was already concerned at the end of chapter 1 about divisions in the church and here he gets specific about who may be causing these divisions. There were people in the early church (and periodically down through ages) know as antinomians. The word is a Greek compound word: anti – meaning against or opposite of; nomos – meaning Law. So the antinomian were people in the church who believed that God’s grace meant that there was no need for moral law. It didn’t matter what you did, God would forgive you. This is what Paul is speaking to in Romans 6:1-2: “What shall we say then? Are we

to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who dies to sin still live in it?"

- These people, who were baptized members of the church, lived like immoral gluttons. "Drink as much as you like! If it feels good, do it! God loves you and Jesus paid the price for your sin! You're forgiven everything so do whatever makes you feel good!"
- They may have brought the Greek philosophy of Gnosticism into the church with them. Both Paul and John fought hard against this paganistic thinking. Gnosticism taught that there were only two realities: spirit (which was totally good) and matter (which was totally evil). So the idea was that given that body was matter it was inherently evil and nothing could fix it. As long as you were right in your spirit you were good. So live as evil and disgusting as you like, your body is just doing what it was made for, expressing its true nature, just worship God on Sunday on keep your spirit good. Their idea of Jesus Christ was that he was not really human, did not live in the flesh. "How could He?" they reasoned, "As the Son of God He cannot no be evil so He cannot have come in the flesh. This is why John says what he says in John 1:14 - "... and the Word became flesh and lived among us." And in 1 John 1:1 - "...what we looked at and touch with our hands...". There was another school of Gnostic thought that said you would never be a complete person until you experienced all that life had. There was no good or evil, there was only what you enjoyed and what you did not. So in either way of thinking, which was always lurking around the church's door, there was no moral law at all. Our culture has this same view. Any time a celebrity dies the media and the culture it speaks to automatically send this person to heaven. How they lived their life is unimportant. Fame and celebrity is all you need to get into heaven and woe be to the person who suggests otherwise!
- To combat this, Paul issues a challenge: if you have a different "attitude" from those who are *teleios*, God will show you that to correct you, and keep living by the same moral/ethical/spiritual standard that Paul and the other mature leaders have. But then he even goes further...

## Vss. 17-21

- Few teachers or preachers would say out loud “imitate me if you want to know what it is to be a real Christian; follow my example!”. It wasn’t enough to say, “Listen to what I’m telling you”, Paul said “Look at my example!” A friend in high school would say, “I’m not conceited. I’m convinced!” Paul was convinced that his life was the life Christ expected of every one of His followers. To Paul, for him to say, “Look at my example!” was not bragging, it was just fact.
- Vss. 18-19 - Now Paul is on a roll and calls out the people he’s speaking of. He writes broken hearted, that people in the church, perhaps people he led to Christ, have come to a point where the best that can be said of them is that they are “enemies of the cross of Christ”. From the beginning it seems there are people who have joined a church but who have never joined Christ. These are people who have been baptized, but they did not get saved, they just got wet. So, these are people in the church, causing division, acting openly immoral, and who are in fact enemies of Christ. It is not a matter of them losing their salvation. They were never saved. They just found a group of people they could exploit. So, their end is not eternal life with Christ, but destruction. Their god is not our Father in Heaven, but instead is their “appetite”, their “belly”, their fleshly desires. They are happy slaves to their addictions. Their glory is to see who among them can be the most depraved and immoral, which is only to their shame. They are pure materialists, setting their eyes only on earthly things: money sex, wine, food, pleasure. What they fail to see is that it all just turns to dust.

## Vss. 20-21

- This is who **THEY** are, these internal enemies of Christ. Paul said in Ch. 1 that the external enemies had no chance against the church (vs. 28) IF they remained united in spirit, mind, and purpose. But an enemy *within* the church could be disastrous if not dealt with. For **THESE** people, their appetite is their god and they are rooted in their earthly quest for pleasure.

- But **OUR** citizenship, our commonwealth, is in Heaven. This is a concept the Philippians could easily grasp. While Philippi was hundreds of miles away from Rome, they were nevertheless all citizens of that far away city. As such, they spoke Latin day to day as Romans would, they dressed and lived out the customs of the people of Rome, they were governed by Roman magistrates who carried out Roman law. In every way they were completely and unchangeably Roman. What Paul is helping them to see is that even though they are not in Rome per se, and they live thoroughly as citizens of Rome, then likewise even though they are not yet in Heaven, they are to live thoroughly as citizens of Heaven, keeping all the customs, manners, and laws of the Kingdom of God.
- Paul ends this part of his letter with a word of hope. Our citizenship is in heaven and many witnessed our Savior's ascension into Heaven. He is at the right hand of the Father and He will return and when He does everything and everyone will be changed (1 Cor. 15:42-53).
- "the body of our humble state" – that is a wordy translation of a Greek word meaning "subject to decay, negative change, weakness, illness, and death". Other translations use the term "vile body" which is an outdated use of "vile", which once meant merely "cheap, valueless".
- What Paul is saying to us is that one day, when Christ returns, our bodies will be transformed into a glorified body like His. The weakness of our mortal bodies, which fare reasonably well on earth, will be transformed to live gloriously in Heaven. This is what we press on toward, what we hold firmly to. This is what we keep our eyes fixed on as we look forward. We cannot allow earthly pleasures to distract us or keep us from our goal in any way.