

Philippians (Part Eight)

Philippians 3:1-16

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Given 26-Sep-89; Sermon #BS-PH08

Let us get back into the book of Philippians. And again, a very quick review of the beginning of chapter 3.

I mentioned to you that there is a rather abrupt transition at the beginning of the chapter. It almost looked as though Paul was about to end the letter when he must have thought of something else, and he went on to what becomes actually 40% of the letter, and he was actually going over, at least at the beginning of it, some things that were common knowledge between them. But it was something that he wanted to go into once again in order to encourage them because he felt that the repetitious teaching of it would be good for them.

That, of course, had to do with their contact through persecution from the Jews who were in the area, and as he said that they were dogs. I am pretty sure that he meant it in the sense of being like an old hound dog dogging the heels of whatever it was it happened to be trailing, and that is what the Jews were doing in regard to the Christians. They simply would not let well enough alone, but they kept dogging after them in an attempt to try to persuade them away from their newfound faith in Jesus Christ.

And then he went on to say something a great deal more derogatory about them, and that is that he called them the mutilated ones. He was, of course, referring to the practice of circumcision, and he called them that because they had completely lost sight of the spiritual intent in circumcision and were actually looking, apparently, to circumcision itself as having some kind of a redeeming quality to it. And then he went on to explain that those who were in Christ were the true circumcision, and their circumcision, of course, as he described in other places, was of the heart. It was of the Spirit and not of the letter, and that they had the right understanding and hopefully had the right use of it.

Then he goes into a section here from verses 4 through 7, where he puts his pedigree. And I am sure that he did this in order to show them that his attitude toward the Jews was not in any way based upon any jealousy on his part. That he had everything in his pedigree that they had, and indeed in many cases *more* than they had. And so he gives his pedigree: That he was circumcised the 8th day, that he was of the tribe of Benjamin, that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and concerning the law, a Pharisee, that he was an extremely zealous person, that he persecuted the church, and concerning the righteousness which is of the law or in the law, he was blameless.

Now this thought about the righteousness which is in the law triggered something else which actually becomes very important over the remainder of this chapter. And it concerns something that is rather important to us as well to understand as clearly as we can, a distinction that is necessary for us to understand. And that is, on the one hand we are required by God to set our will and strive to achieve a morality that is certainly better than those people who are living around us, yet we have to do so with an understanding that though this striving is required of us, we have to be very careful of it. Because that striving can never be relied upon to produce the righteousness that will be required for salvation.

That righteousness that is going to be required from salvation is something that is *given*. It is given of God, even though resisting the flesh or resisting the mind or making the flesh do that which is right and good in God's sight is something that is good for us to do, even as it is good for those in the world to be moral in that way. I think that you would rather live in a neighborhood full of moral people who resist the pulls of the flesh than you would living in a neighborhood where there was total abandonment of anything that was moral. So Paul is not in any way trying to downgrade that at all but rather saying that that kind of morality will not do for salvation.

Now the question is, why? Well, I will tell you a major reason why and hopefully as we proceed tonight that will become clearer. And that is that any morality that is produced that way is self-limiting in its growth. In other words, it reaches a point where it can grow no further. Now is that point where it reaches that no growth stage, that plateau is a reality in terms of human nature. It can only get so good, if I can put it that way, and it will proceed no further. In other words, it reaches a limit. And that limit comes

nowhere near the righteousness of God. Why, God says in Isaiah 64:6 "all of our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" compared to His. So we cannot rely on that which comes by the setting of one's will, even though the setting of one's will is required. We have got to understand that there is a righteousness that comes by faith that motivates a quality of righteousness and produces a quality of righteousness that humanly is impossible.

Just kind of hang on to that. Let me try to give you before we escape this a couple of illustrations, if I can think of them, of how Christ illustrated this. It seems as though the people that He had most of his interesting exchanges with were the Pharisees. And they were a very moral people. There was just no doubt about it. But I want you to think about how the Bible pictures their morality.

First of all, in comparison to Christ, it was very narrow-minded, ungenerous, unforgiving, judgmental, critical to an extreme, persecuting; you see, where they felt it was their responsibility to be the example for everybody else, and if people did not follow their example, then they had the right to *force* them to follow their example! In other words, theirs was a morality that deliberately and with force attempted to control other people's lives. No generosity of spirit in it. And Christ even told them, "Yeah," He says, "You go around a tithing of mint, anise, and cumin, but you've omitted the weightier of your matters of the law: judgment, mercy, and faith." Their morality excluded that and yet they were a very moral people.

You can begin to see intolerant and ungenerous and narrow of spirit toward other people. So Jesus said that they were like whited sepulchers full of dead men's bones. That was His assessment of their morality. And yet you see, on the surface, these were among the best that humanity would ever produce. Paul said, Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, he was blameless. And he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was outstanding even among the Pharisees. And yet look what he did and you begin to get a picture from the Pharisees of what is wrong with man's righteousness. And that is that it is filled with, it cannot escape, self-interest.

Now, God's righteousness is totally outgoing. Un-self-concern. Love is not given with the thought of getting something back in return. Love is given simply because it is good. It is the right thing to do. Even though it would

like to get a loving response in return, it is not absolutely necessary that that kind of righteousness gets the right response in return, but still the righteousness will be given. It is not demanding or intolerant. But it is patient and kind and generous and good and loyal, see, without end.

So the problem with the righteousness which is of the law is that it is immediately self-limiting and it is limited by self-interest. Humanly we do things to *get* and that is its fatal flaw. We do it because it is good for us. I had on the edge of my mind an example. Again, it is from the Pharisees. And it comes out in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Here Jesus was talking to these people, these moral people. And so He gives them this illustration. Now, who took care of the man who was injured? Well, the Samaritan did. Who passed him by? The Levite. I think the other one was a priest who passed him by. Now by that illustration, He shows that their morality, their righteousness, which was of the law and blameless, was exclusivist.

The righteousness of man reaches a point where it excludes others from its circle and associates only with those who are exactly like it is. So the Pharisees became a fanatical clique that excluded others from its circle of friendship, except when they could make a proselyte and they saw a gain for themselves in that way. So that is where its fatal flaws lies. And its fatal flaw is that it is self-limiting and it is self-limiting because of self-interest.

Now what happened when God converted the man, he began to see new realities or new potentialities in terms of growth that he never even envisioned before that. Do you remember how he described in Romans the 7th chapter how that God opened his mind to a discovery of the application of the law of God to Himself, and he said that when the law came, sin revived and I died. You know what that law that was that he was talking about? It was the tenth commandment. It was the law concerning lust. He began to see insights into the law where he who was blameless, knew now that he had to grow.

This becomes important over the next section to give you understanding of what Paul was driving at. Now remember, he still has in mind the division that had broken out in the fight between these two ladies. Somehow or

another this thing had to be resolved between these two ladies. It is not that it was necessarily breaking up the church, but it might lead to the second death for one or both of these two ladies, and Paul did not want to see that at all.

Now he is beginning to intimate that what right do they have to look down their nose at each other. Is it not possible that the righteousness which they feel that they have is *of the law* and that maybe there is more that needs to be added to their character, that there has to be growth that takes place, that somehow or another they have to find the ability to humble themselves in order to break through this barrier that is keeping these two ladies apart. See, maybe they had reached the limit of their self-righteousness. Because evidently they had because they were finding it too difficult to forgive.

Is a person who cannot forgive righteous? It is certainly a very disturbing and hindering weakness. And yet this person who cannot forgive might not ever think of murdering or lying or stealing. But his self-interest, you see, in not forgiving because he wants to protect himself is keeping him from the righteousness of God. There is more to the righteousness of God than merely keeping the Ten Commandments. And that is an area that the carnal mind does not want to step into it and so it limits itself. And what happens is each carnal person sets his own limits. The carnal person is not being limited by the standard, which is Jesus Christ. He is being limited by his own mind.

Let us go to verse 7. He says,

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

He willingly gave them up whenever he began to recognize the righteousness of Christ. Now that happened on the road to Damascus when he was struck down and we begin to see that the key to the righteousness of God is this giving up of the self. You see, the self-renunciation.

Now one of the reasons Paul gave his pedigree here was so that these people would understand that this is the kind of thing that, let us say, gains a person's trust and comes between him and God and it is one of the limiting factors. See, that is why Christ said to the rich young ruler the things that He did: Give up all of your wealth, He told the young man. And the reason was

that the young man did not realize that he was worshipping wealth. Because his answer to Christ was, I have kept all those things from my youth. In his own eyes, you see, his righteousness was limited by what he had already accomplished and he had drawn a line. Christ said in a very gentle way, "No, you haven't, young man. There is much more, get rid of your wealth." And so he turned away, very sorrowful, maybe because he was beginning to recognize, at least having glimmerings of seeing that his faith, his trust was really in the power of money. And so he turned away. You see, his righteousness was limited by what he put his trust in. He could never attain to the righteousness of God if he put his trust in money.

So Paul was telling us that all of these things, this fantastic pedigree he had, he gave up, he renounced it whenever he began to see glimmerings of the righteousness of God as it was revealed in Christ. He knew he had a long way to go. Now, what do you think that that did to Paul's feelings about himself? Why, he was filled with guilt, filled with remorse. But as we are going to see, he was also filled with a desire you to be like Christ. Ah, now the righteousness was not going to be limited. And in fact, when we begin to look at it right, the righteousness that is possible in Christ is *limitless* because there is perfection there.

Now this is very important to growth. You see, the key is this self-renunciation. The giving up of the things that we hold humanly, carnally to be valuable, to be worthwhile, something to be hung on to. Job hung on to his feelings about himself. It was limiting him from growing. Well, that is what the rich young man did. That is what Paul did. Very moral men. But you see, human nature puts a limit on growth and everybody does it to himself. You see, God, with His calling, can open a person's mind to limitless possibilities. I might add here, the limitless possibilities of endless creation of the righteousness of God in us. We are beginning to get to the essence of Christian growth. It is very important to understand this.

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, . . .

Over in Ephesians, Paul described it as the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Not knowledge *about* Him, but *Christ's knowledge*. Brethren, is there any limit to that knowledge? I mean, that is the knowledge that created the earth! That is

the knowledge that has all the secrets of life. It has the power of endless creation. Everything that is right and good. It is limitless! We cannot be stuck behind human nature. We have got to give up on it, you see, and he suffered the loss of everything, of all things for the excellence of the knowledge *of*. Again, not the knowledge *about*, the knowledge *of*.

Earlier in this book, he mentioned that it is God who works in us both to will and to do. And I said to you there, that it was not a working *for* salvation but a working to make salvation, or faith, practical by experience. That is, to make faith work in your life. Now that is what Paul was aiming for here. That is how one gets the knowledge of Christ. It is not in reading about Him, but rather it is reading about Him and yielding to Him. It takes the combination for us to have experience in living this way, experience in God's righteousness. As long as it is just head knowledge, it will never work. Then it is merely theory.

Eternal life, remember, is not just length of days. Eternal life is a way of living. It is a quality of life. And it has to be experienced in order for it to be appreciated, and we can begin to experience it, here and now, through the power of God's Spirit by yielding to Him. If we will just give up on human nature which constantly wants to exert itself against the knowledge of God.

Philippians 3:8-9 the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

I mentioned something to you the last time. That one of the problems of human nature is that it fits right into this, and that is, that it is never quite right. We cannot get things quite right. And that is the way all of us are. Human nature is never quite right.

Perhaps you remember the movie "The Eye of the Beholder." I do not know whether you have ever seen that movie. The last time I saw it the print was just terrible and you could not see things too clear, it was getting a little bit blurry. And the film had broken many times and been pieced together and it did not quite tell the story as well as it could.

But anyway, it was a film to show a person, show you and me, teach you and me, how people look at things from their own perspective. And so, they showed this episode, and then they proceeded to show how three different people saw the event. And each one saw it somewhat differently, and they showed in the movie how each person's mind was prejudiced by other things that were in the background. And maybe each person told a story that was true, but it was only true from their perspective.

What this means in practical application is that whenever human beings are together in some kind of an endeavor, whether it is in the community, whether it is in trying to accomplish a work as in the church, or trying to make a marriage work, you are going to have people looking at things from a somewhat different perspective and from their perspective, what they see and what they say may be reasonably accurate. But it is always going to be covered by its own prejudices, its own self-interest. See, the righteousness is being limited already, and I know that if you are thinking, you are going to have to agree with me.

Now if somebody will not give up on their self-interest, you are going to have a fight. You are going to have a war if enough people are involved. You might have a civil war, as in a nation, or a war between nations, if people will not give up on their perspective of the truth.

What this means then is that since human nature never can quite get things right, relationships are always going to be in a state of semi-agitation. And in order for a community to exist, to be unified, we have to be open to be corrected by somebody else. If we are not, chaos. Absolute chaos.

Now what often happens is, and the Bible counsels it, again because human righteousness is the way it is, it does not get things quite right—even though it may have good intentions, even though it may be reporting honest—it is narrow in its view. So in order to broaden the view, the Bible counsels that we seek a multitude of counselors. But even that will not work unless we allow ourselves to be corrected by these multitude of counselors, who in turn, because they have their prejudices, also have to be corrected by us.

In other words, God is saying there has to be a quite tolerant spirit, willing to compromise, willing to submit if there is going to be unity and harmony in a community. Now you can do this if you have the Spirit of God and your hope is not in this world. If your hope is in this world, you are going to fight because you are going to want a resolution of this problem right now, your way, according to your self-interest.

Now Jesus had the solution. It says in I Peter 2 that He committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. In other words, He took the long range view. He was suspicious of His own human nature and everybody else's as well, but He knew that God saw the picture entirely and perfectly with a righteousness, you see, that was totally impartial. There was the resolution of the problem. But Christ had to put His trust in Him and patiently wait for God to reveal it—and be willing to suffer until God did reveal it.

So Christ, then, He did not attempt to control other people's lives according to His perspective like the Pharisees did. His righteousness so far exceeded theirs, there was no comparison. Because, you see, He had a righteousness which was by faith in God and it was not limited by human reason.

Are you beginning to see what Paul is heading for in this letter with these two ladies? I will tell you, that man was a spiritual genius. I mean, Paul. What subtlety! I mean good subtlety. What tact! And he did it without ever attacking either one of them. He never said to either of them, you are wrong. Just an awesome job. What an awesome mind.

Philippians 3:9-10 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, . . .

That is an interesting approach. You see, he is saying there that he wants to know by experience Christ's resurrection. And he is talking about right here and now, as well as off in the future. You know, what he is saying here is, "Hey, Jesus Christ is alive. He sits at the right hand of God, and He is the

One who mediates the Spirit by which God created everything and He can give that power to you." And he wanted to experience that power working in his life as well. That is what he meant by the power of His resurrection.

Again, you see, eternal life is a quality of life that is afforded to individuals by the Spirit of God. It takes God's Spirit to live that way. And you live that way by the power of the resurrected Christ. It is His Spirit that works in it. And that Spirit comes when we renounce human nature—ourselves.

Philippians 3:10 . . . and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, . . .

I think what he is saying there is that anyone who strives to live as Christ did is going to irritate other people. Not by the fact that he is on their case or anything like that. But it is going to do in that person's life what it did in Christ's life. Because if Christ lives in us, it is going to create some of those same jealousies, fears, that it did to the Pharisees, and with it will come persecution. There will also be a measure of suffering as a result of the striving, the setting of the will to live that way, and human nature constantly trying to exert, or re-exert, its influence in your life and make you rely on the limitations of human nature and escape or provide a deliverance by satiating the flesh or the mind. Again, humanly. And we do not want to do that. So we will accept a deliverance through satisfying the flesh or the mind. If we go Christ's way, we will probably suffer through the setting of our will to live that way.

Well, Paul said he is not going to do that. He is going to suffer even though he does not want to suffer. He is going to set his will and he is going to do what God wants him to do.

Philippians 3:11 . . . if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Now, there is something that just vaguely appears in that verse in the English that is much more apparent in the Greek and it provides somewhat of a puzzle to the world's scholars. And that is that the Greek indicates a measure of doubt in Paul's mind that he will attain the resurrection. In the English, they could not get that across very well. So they said, if, by any

means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. On the other hand, the Greek also indicates an expectation that he would be there. So it seems to show them a measure of confusion. On the one hand, some doubt that he would be there. On the other hand, that he was sure he would be there. That does not appear too clearly in the English.

But I think that the answer to it is this: that his only doubt was whether it would occur before or after he died. Now you can see from his writings that he was expecting Christ to return. Some of his later writings seem to indicate that by this time he understood that Christ would not come in his lifetime. But nonetheless, there was just some doubt there in his mind regarding *when* it would occur.

Verse 12. Let us get into this paragraph.

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Here we begin to get a very clear indication of what I was talking about earlier, and that is that the difference between the righteousness that is by the law and the righteousness which comes by faith, is that the righteousness which is by the law is self-limiting. It is limited by self-interest. Now here it begins to become clear that Paul showed that, even though in verse 6 he said "concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," indicating a measure of perfection, that he could not go any further. And I guess the answer to that is that he is not yet perfected. There you have a very clear statement of a major difference between the righteousness which is by the law and the righteousness which is by faith. One is *self*-limiting, the other is *limitless*. So Paul, and of course us as well, have not reached the final completeness that we are aspiring for.

Let us tie this to something else. Paul said that when one is in Christ, he is a new creation. Now what is God? God is Creator. You might say, all of us have a job. Things we do for money or for pleasure on this earth. Now God has a job too. If people ask you what God does, you can tell them, He creates. He is the Creator and that is how He introduces Himself in the Bible in Genesis the first chapter. The first view we have of God is the view that

eventually becomes the most important one. God begins by showing us that He is Creator, that He shows us [Him] creating the physical realm in order to get the understanding in our minds that ultimately He is greatest when it comes to creating holy, righteous, spiritual character. That is the epitome of His creation.

Now if God is in the business of creating holy and righteous spiritual character which will lead, of course, to sons and daughters born again into His Family, then we find out that human righteousness is self-limiting. It is limited by self-interest, and everybody draws their own lines, their own limits as to how far their human righteousness can go, then we can begin to appreciate that when God says that we are a new creation, that what He is creating in us has no limit to it. It will never end.

Can we yield to that kind of a concept? What does it take in one's mindset to yield to something like that. Are you ready for this? If you think that life since you have been called has been difficult and full of spiritual trials—trials with human nature, trials with overcoming the flesh, overcoming the appetite, overcoming the sins of the mind: lust, anger, bitterness, resentment, fear—if you think that meeting those challenges have been difficult, they will never end. Is that [unclear]?

Brethren, it has to be that way! Because if it is not that way, we have drawn a limit to what God can create in us. When we reach the place where we are satisfied with what we are, God cannot do anything more with us. Do you understand that? You see, the righteousness which is by faith always has to be met with an open mind in those who are converted that 'I am not perfect. I still am so full of human unrighteousness, there is no end to it.'

Brethren, what a humbling thought that is! Because we tend to think of ourselves as being God's answer to humanity. I mean, if there were more people like us, this world would be a good place, would it not? I mean, if I was going to live next door to somebody, I would live next door to me.

Are you beginning to see the difference between the righteousness that comes by law and the righteousness which is of God? There is no end to our depravity. Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." That word means incurably sick, because it reflects the

mind of Satan. Do we understand that? Human nature is simply a human expression of the mind of Satan. *Satan will not repent*. It is incurably sick, stuck on itself. Filled with pride, sick with anger and hatred and bitterness and resentment and envy and lust and every other evil thing, full of murder and lying. And the only thing that can put a limit on that is you and me.

You see, we are in the middle between God and Satan, and though God initiates our salvation and can carry it through, He can only carry it through with our permission. That is where the free moral agency comes in. And in order for us to give Him permission, we have to catch a vision of two things. And those two things are on the one hand, the utter disgust with the horror of human nature and on the other hand, the awesome beauty of the holiness of God, so that we will forsake the one and cling to the other and be so attracted by it, we will drive ourselves in that direction. Just give ourselves over to it. He has given you and me the choice.

That is why Paul wanted to know Christ. He wanted to know that holiness that would give him the power to be motivated to go in the right direction, because he had the choice to make. And so do you. And that is what you want to catch a vision of. And that is why God in this Book tells us what His Son was like. He wants us to be so attracted by it, so inspired by it—by the vision we see of that unselfishness, of that kindness, of that gentleness, of the willingness to heal, of the desire to lift up and to change people into something else—that we want to do the same thing and live the same kind of life that He did. That is what He is after.

Do you understand Proverbs 29:18, where it says, "Without vision the people perish"? Or as another Bible says, another translation, "Without vision (or without revelation), the people run wild." Or another one says, "Without revelation, people cast off restraint." Paul wanted with everything within him to restrain human nature. But he also had the revelation of God that would provide the vision to go in the right direction.

And so he says, not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on. He did not give up. He did not allow what he saw of the futility and the horror of human nature to make him feel so guilty that it dragged him down or stopped him. No, he had something else to counterbalance it. He worked on that, see, the vision of God and of His Son Jesus Christ. I am

not talking about with his eyes. I am talking about in his mind's eyes. The things that he could read in the Scripture of the mind of God, you see, how pure and how holy it is.

But I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Eternal life, being born again into the Kingdom of God. That is what he wanted, because that is what God called him for, and that is what God has called you and me for, and that is what He wants to give us. So he says,

Philippians 3:13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, . . .

Think of that statement in relation to the war that was going on between these two ladies. If we are not willing to give up the past, we are going to have trouble with the future.

Now "forgetting" here does not mean obliterating the memory of. That is a human impossibility. We cannot forget, apparently like God is able to forget. That is not what Paul was talking about. But Paul consciously refused to allow these things from the past to absorb his attention and impede his progress. He was going to do all in his power to make sure that he got into the Kingdom of God. I will tell you, if there was anybody who had reason to feel guilty, bad, terrible, or whatever about his past in relation to Christianity, it was the apostle Paul. You can tell from his writings he never forgot it, but you can also tell from his writings he never let it hold him back either. If he had allowed it to hold him back, he would not be a very good witness for Jesus Christ. He would never have been an apostle. But he did not allow it to hold him back.

So, do not ever try to reduce Christianity to being nothing more than just a perfect moral code. Because that it is not. There are a lot of religions that are moral. As I mentioned to you before, sure, Christianity is a moral religion, and Christianity is the *most* moral of all religions. But Christianity has a Spirit with it that the other religions do not have. And that Spirit is the Spirit of God, which is a Spirit of power!

You see, it enables a person's mind to be open so that they are motivated to understand that they are the recipients of the unlimited creative powers of God. And that anything can be overcome with that God working in it. There may be some setting of the will and there may be some pain involved in it. There may be some suffering, but the power of that Spirit is limitless. And not only is the power limitless, it is the Spirit of love. Again, human righteousness concentrates on the self, selfishness. But God's love, God's Spirit, God's righteousness, concentrates on what is good for others. It is outgoing.

Christianity, then, is a kind of life that is unattainable through human will. It is something that has to be given. God initiated it through His calling. It is something that comes down from God out of heaven to us. And then what does it do? It works on our minds. It catches our imagination. And it begins to motivate us, move us in a different direction. It turns us around. Sometimes we fight it. But when we actually do it, we do it willingly. And we do it willingly because it has caught our imagination. That is a gift of God. He has revealed Himself and His purpose and His Son. Playing with our minds. But He is playing with it in love and it is for our good. He is not playing with it to manipulate. Because He will not take away our free moral agency. But He is playing with it to help us to think in directions that will make us exercise our will to move toward the righteousness of God, which is limitless.

Now, if you can begin to put this together, you can begin to see where the joy of Christianity comes in, in spite of the problems. Men and women, there is a world out there that is awesome in its potential. I mean, the world that God inhabits. What is said in Hebrews 12 of what drove Christ forward? It says that He did what He did because of "the joy that was set before Him." It is those kinds of things that we need to ask God for so that we will have as much motivation as we possibly can to help lift us out of the mundane carnal life that we are constantly surrounded by and which the world is trying to pull us back into. You can begin to see that that life, really I should say reality, exists, and that it exists somewhere else.

Philippians 3:14 . . . I press toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

It is very easy to see where Paul had his mind. Certainly he kept his eyes on the world about him. But his focus was beyond the immediate. Now this does not mean that he had such a super clear vision of things that were to come because he himself admitted that we looked through a glass darkly. But what he had was enough to really inspire and motivate him, make him drive himself. He says he beat his body lest he found himself a castaway.

Paul set his will. Paul disciplined himself. You see, he did not limit himself in terms of what could be produced within himself, he never allowed himself to get self-satisfied. So he kept pressing forward. And you can be sure that God was faithful to Paul, and He kept opening Paul's mind to greater possibilities in terms of righteousness. Because He gave Paul insight into where he had fallen short.

So, with a master craftsman at work like God the potential, see, is God.

He says, "I press toward the goal for the prize." So Paul is using a metaphor here which indicates that life is a race towards something, toward a goal. It is a metaphor that he uses occasionally and undoubtedly taken from athletics. And it is very likely the way this thing is worded in the Greek, that the goal and the prize are one and the same thing. But he used both words in order to put emphasis, first of all, on the goal, which puts the emphasis on the race. You see, here and now. The race is in progress and we are running toward an end, a goal. The word "prize" shifts the emphasis to the time when the race will be over, when we have reached the goal and we have the prize. And the goal and the prize become one and the same thing.

Now, it is interesting that he uses the word "upward call," because apparently it was something that was taken right out of the athletic games of his day. In track and field meets there are always judges who are watching what is going on. And so you have a judge who makes sure that all the athletes, all the runners start at the same time and that somebody does not jump the gun. Then there are other judges who are watching the progress of the race to make sure that everybody runs the race fairly and somebody does not get out of his lane and impede the progress of another runner and bumping and things of that nature. Then there is usually another judge who is at the end of the race and affirms who it was who won the race. This is especially important when a race is close and there are two or three runners

coming in practically chest to chest, headed for the line. Things have gotten so close now they have photographs taken whenever the line or the string is broken.

That is what Paul was alluding to here. In the Greek games, it was their custom for the judge or the judges to be standing on an elevated platform so that they could watch the course of the whole race and not be impeded by the crowd, so that their vision would be clear of what was going on. And then after the race was over, the judge motioned for the winner to mount onto the platform with him. You see, an upward calling, and from there then he went up and received the wreath of victory, his prize from the judge, who then affirmed that indeed this person was the winner.

Now he is tying this all together with Christianity. You see, that we have had an upward call. We have been called of God to rise above the rest, and to be a winner in this race and come to receive the prize. So, Paul then sees life as being a race toward which we are heading. I should say a goal toward which we are heading in this race, and he does not feel as though he has reached the end of his rope yet.

This is interesting. This is coming from a man who is in prison and he is awaiting perhaps a fatal verdict. And you might think that somebody in that kind of a situation would be thinking, concentrating on themselves, would be down in the mouth of all of his bad luck and saddened by the way life had treated him. But no, he is talking about continually improving even in prison. So he had not reached the end of perfection yet. Have you? So he presses toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature [If you have a King James, it will say perfect there. Mature is a more correct translation.], have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Mature or perfect does not mean sinless. But rather he is indicating people who have reached a certain level of growth and stability in their lives. What he is doing here, he is calling on those who have progressed in the faith to a, let us say, recognized degree of maturity. He is calling on those people to recognize the truth that he has just written of in verses 2 through 14.

Now, what is the truth? In an overall sense in this section it is that every single one of us, even though we may have progressed to a certain level of stability and maturity, still has a long way to go toward the perfection of God, and we better have the mind in us that will enable God to continue to work in and through it. But if we do not, you see, we are going to limit it. We are the ones who put the limitations on God.

At the end of that verse where he says, "and if any of you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you," he is saying to them that if they generally agree but if they differ in minor points, Paul is confident that God will lead them to the truth if their minds are open to correction. That is why I said to you, if God is our Creator and God is working with us, God is never going to be satisfied entirely with the way we are. Because there is more to work out, there is more to build in, there is more to create. That does not mean that He is unhappy with it. Do not get that impression. He can be very happy with the progress we have made and yet not satisfied that we have grown enough yet. And so it does not mean at all that God is displeased because He wants to continue to work on us and perfect it.

I have spoken to people that maybe perform some special music somewhere. And I have exclaimed to them how much I appreciated and how beautiful what they did was, really appreciated their artistry and skill. But usually it would not be very long before they would be pointing out to me all of the flaws that were in what they did. I could not see them at all. But to them, their performance was something that, well, they may have been reasonably pleased with, but it was not anywhere near as well as they felt that they could have done. That is the way an artist is. A true artist is always going to be pushing himself for greater perfection.

And that is the way God is. And so He wants us to recognize that. Not that He is unhappy with us, not that He is displeased. But He still sees a lot of flaws that He wants to try to get out, and would we please yield to it.

So that is what Paul is saying. Now anybody who has that mind, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,"—a mind of humility, a mind that recognizes that it is not perfect yet, a mind that is not setting limitations on God, a mind that is not satisfied the way that it is—if a person has that

kind of a mind, God is going to be able to do wonderful things with that mind because it is going to be open to change, correction.

Philippians 3:16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

This has to be tied to the previous verse, the tail end of it. He says, "and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, . . ." He is saying to those people, let us not wait on God to do this. Each and every one of us should exercise the degree of maturity already attained and be striving to grow.

Now, what is this, "Let us be of the same mind"? Here are several things that come from this section that begins in chapter 2.

1. Ready to quickly admit wrong and shortcomings.
2. It *can* be corrected.
3. It is open to new insight.
4. Thus, it is willing to be refashioned.
5. Perfection is a growth process.