

<b>Series:</b> The Fellowship of the Gospel	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Philippians 3:15-21</i>	<b>Title:</b> Running Well	<b>Date:</b> 11.08.2020
<b>Website Writeup:</b> Run as if to win the prize for which you've been called heavenward in Christ! The race isn't over until it's over, what's behind is behind, don't look back - stay focused on Jesus!			

On August 7, 1954, at the British Empire Games in Vancouver, the greatest mile-long race took place, touted as the *miracle mile*, between the Brit, Roger Bannister & Australian John Landy. Roger Bannister strategized, he'd relax during the third lap & save everything for his final drive. But as they began that third lap, Landy poured it on, stretching his already substantial lead. Bannister adjusted his strategy, increased his pace & gained on Landy. The lead diminished & in the final lap they were even. Both ran faster. But when Landy couldn't hear Bannister's footfall & looked back...was a fatal lapse of concentration, enough for Bannister to lurch forward & win by five yards.

The Apostle Paul would've seen Landy's mistake - knowing, to be successful you can't look back, because with even the slightest glance back, there's a momentary loss of focus & rhythm, incurring the critical loss of even a fraction of a second.<sup>1</sup>

We ended last week with Paul saying in vv13-14 of Chapter 3, *Forgetting what is behind & straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*. Paul's talked a lot about how we train for & run this race of faith. To understand Philippians 3:15-21, we have to remember what he's already said. At the very heart of Philippians is the call to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27). This demands unity in taking on the Mind of Christ, working out our salvation with fear & trembling, since we live in a dark world which seeks to upend spiritual formation. Christ is center of this letter, in keeping focus on Him we put away fear, grasp faith, eradicate anxiety & find joy even in suffering!

Paul reminds, Scripture is revealed & Jesus is revealed in them. Not originating from within us, they're given. The Christian life is derived from Christ & directed to Him as the principle, rule & end of it. So we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, standing firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith without being frightened by opposition, since it's been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him. Paul calls us to allow a biblical worldview, in singular devotion to Christ & the Scriptures which reveal Him, to filter out into, not only attitude, but a lifestyle worthy of His name. Therefore, we do what God dictates as good, because it brings life. We don't do what He prohibits, because it brings death. While assured of our position in Christ, we work out salvation with fear & trembling because we want to serve our King well. Forgetting what's behind, we strain toward what's ahead, pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus! Not distracted by looking back, but focusing on Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 148.

And today he writes...<sup>15</sup>*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.*  
<sup>16</sup>*Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

Last week Paul gave us a list of his past accomplishments. But he's clear, the mature person doesn't look back while running the race of faith. The past is the past, accomplishments & failures both lay on the trail of life as memories & don't dictate the trail ahead. The race isn't over until it's over.

The mature Christian runs in such a way, understanding that the finish line is ahead, they can trip & fall. They don't skate on accomplishment, nor do they grow despairing in failure, both are worthless in light of what lies ahead. With the wisdom of knowing we can be distracted & manipulated off route, we pour our energies into a full pursuit of the knowledge of Jesus & a life reflective of Him. Even as we run, we're being transformed. The Spirit will challenge & change some of our thinking & lifestyle over time. As Paul states repetitively, we're to be about God's Glory in pursuit of God's mission - Jesus' last command is our first concern (Mt 28:18-20). We do all we do, in order to see the kingdom of God expanded, that more & more people will know true freedom in Christ! *As one pastor says, "Those who pursue Christ, produce those who pursue Christ. Those who continue to run after Christ stand firm in Christ."*<sup>2</sup>

I'm currently reading the book, *Another Gospel, A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity*, by Alisa Childers. As she ran her race of faith she was distracted by the new progressive false Gospel being pursued & preached by many today, which at its core denies the authority of God's Word. Therefore, calling into question all the basic doctrines of Christianity.

Her faith was almost shipwrecked, but the Spirit spoke to her & brought her back to life-giving orthodoxy. Like many authors writing today, she says some things which although I agree with, wouldn't say them the same way. She suggests that if Pastors & Leaders in the church had spoken differently, or shown more compassion to certain folks, people wouldn't have been drawn away by this false progressive gospel. If her argument was only about the psychology of communication, that's logical, and we admit, all leadership should be devoted to ministering to others well. But...where I disagree - it suggests that leadership's responsible for peoples response in how well we minister to them. That can't be true given the insidiousness nature of sin, the complexity of the human heart, and the influence of the spiritual & physical realm all around us. People are responsible for their own walk & we do influence each other, and hopefully that's towards Christ. Christians are simply called to proclaim Jesus, baptize & teach all he's commanded, how that's taken by another is up to God & the person receiving the message. Admittedly, there have been abuses, but we can't judge a belief system by its abusers - a person is responsible to ultimately go back to Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 156.

As individuals we need to run knowing the enemy is on our heels, not looking back, keeping our focus on Christ! That enemy will use things inside & outside the church to take your gaze off Jesus, but maturity stays at the table, knowing, we're all growing in Christ together, imperfect beings doing our best to move forward. Many of the stories of people being hurt in church have another side, and often when we dig into them, that person was already being led astray, and was looking for excuses to walk away.

Staying focused on Christ is like a rowboat moored to a dock. Even if the lake's placid, there's always an underlying current tugging at it. If the mooring comes loose, there's no immediate perceptible change, but over hours that boat slowly drifts away inch by inch. Most of the time we only see these changes in a person when they're too far out, and don't want to come back. They're imperceptibly influenced, inch by inch they've floated away. They lose interest, pull out of fellowship & begin to listen to that cultural current which is the antithesis to the Gospel message. Paul's saying, you've come this far, don't be distracted throwing out all you've gained, stay moored to Jesus.

In a race in 1923, the Scottish & French teams were neck & neck. The runners came to the first turn in the 440 shoulder to shoulder, as one was pushed to the ground. Briefly down, he got up, running now twenty meters behind, but straining forward. But as they sprinted to the finish line, he emerged ahead for the famous win immortalized in the movie *Chariots of Fire*.

What would most runners have done? Most would've waved a fist, dusted themselves off & watched the outcome. But Eric Lidell, a Christian, was beyond ordinary & I'm sure had read this passage - forgetting what's behind, straining forward to what lies ahead, I focus all my energy on the race; and seeing the goal, I fly to the finish.

This is the way everyone in the grip of Christ's grace must live. Listen to Paul's explanation in 1 Corinthians 15:10 in reference to his work for the gospel compared to the other apostles... "*...I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*" We're called to relentlessly press on toward the finish line for the full & complete gaining of Christ. Remember, God's not against effort, only earning. Do you feel old & tired? Keep running. Are you young & full of energy? Be a person of 'one thing'.

Eric's running was only one manifestation of his devotion to Christ. In 1925, having completed his degrees in science & divinity, he set sail as missionary to China. In 1932, he married. In 1941, facing Japanese occupation, he sent his wife & three daughters to Canada to stay with her family while he remained to serve the poor. Then in 1943 he was imprisoned where he continued to serve those around him. In 1945 he died of a brain tumor that may've been caused by his malnourishment & overwork. Liddell's grave was marked by a simple wooden cross, with his name written in boot polish. He's now interred in the Mausoleum of Martyrs in China. He certainly died running, a life given to

one thing. “Forgetting what lay behind & straining forward to what lay ahead, [he] press[ed] on for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>3</sup>

Alisa was knocked down, but got up again. The Spirit made clear to her, as Paul states, that when she thought differently, God made clear to her & she’s back running the race of faith! Has the world knocked you down? Have you begun to drift away from the Truth & life of the Gospel? Allow God to lead you back to the race. We need our models, like Eric & Alisa. And that’s what Paul says next...<sup>17</sup>*Join together in following my example, brothers & sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.*

We learn by watching others. Young Johann Sebastian Bach made repeated long trips on foot to the great composer Dietrich Buxtehude’s church to observe & hear him, even copying his scores by hand - all of which had an effect on Bach. His surpassing genius was developed on the lesser genius & example of his mentor.<sup>4</sup> None of us are self-made. We’re influenced by others & culture more than we’d like to admit. Paul’s saying, get around people of mature Christian influence, imitate them until that life becomes muscle memory to you. Pursue Christ in the context of Christian fellowship until you become a person who produces people who pursue Christ.

Then Paul makes very clear to us that this isn’t just about ethereal philosophic religious thought, it filters down to how we live - to behavior. There are moral absolutes in the Christian life - errant thoughts lead to errant behavior, which don’t produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, but rather death. He says...<sup>18</sup>*For, as I have often told you before & now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.*

Philippi was a small town. Like any church, it had people who’d fallen in the race & hadn’t gotten back up. The cultural current led them astray, eventually leaving the church & living in ways reflective of their inner disconnection with Christ & His church. They were the antithesis to the lives of Paul, Timothy & Epaphroditus (two men Paul had commended already). Likely, these people had regular contact with most of the congregation & threatened poisoning the unity of the church. Paul’s tearful grief indicates their apostasy had been a personal loss to him. Evidence that these former converts had become enemies of the cross of Christ is indicated by the way they now walked. Their lifestyles repudiated all the cross stands for, specifically the passionate pursuit of Christ & a cross-centered life of suffering.<sup>5</sup> He then explains what their lives looked like in four intense statements...<sup>19</sup>*Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.*

Their pursuit of comfort displaced the pursuit of Christ & the cross. The professed Christian whose own physical & personal needs come before the Lord, displacing the

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 150–152.

<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 156.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 156–157.

cross, should take note because their god has become their belly. Those whose bodily comforts, such as what & where they eat, how & where they live, and what they spend to satisfy their own pleasures, should be aware, any pleasure can impede a passionate pursuit of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Feelings & desire are subjugate to the Word & Spirit of God in the mature Christian life.

These people gloried in their shame, the sensual excesses, especially in the area of sexuality & the lure of immoral practices of a former life. Understand, they also lived in a deeply sexually perverted society. Ancient peoples did have open homosexual practice even with committed same-sex couples, pedophilia & a myriad of sexual deviances, including temple prostitution. And God had always called Israel & the Church away from these thoughts & actions to a sexual ethic of one man & one woman in committed matrimony with sex being the consummation of that union, reflective of Gods relationship with the Church. If someone struggles in these things, it's understandable, but it must be marked by unity with the mind of Christ, leading to repentance & a lifestyle reflective of God. Unity is when we come into agreement with God, being obedient as to what is best for us & others as God defines it.

Alisa Childers had a friend who called & confessed she was coming out of the closet, and had changed her views on what the Scriptures say about the issue. Alisa asked, "Have you really changed your view of Scripture, or are you just tired of fighting?" After a long pause, she said, "I'm just tired of fighting." Some of us get tired of fighting the fight of faith, and give up expecting the church to change its views for us, but we can no less change the Word of God than shoot the sun out of the sky.

Like us, they'd come out of a former life & culture unreflective of God, but in coming to Christ we repent of our sin, and still do as we slip back into whatever form it takes. Paul's talking about the person who's fallen down, blames others & begins to live in an unrepentant way once more. Their minds set on earthly things & now diametrically opposed to true citizens of heaven. They repudiate the moral standards to which the Gospel of Christ calls His people. This possibly signifies, the Word of Christ hadn't originally fallen on fertile soil. Maybe they had only an emotional response to Jesus & not a heart-changing conviction. Therefore, when it came to suffering, or outward distraction, they quickly cave. We're not perfect who pursue Christ, the difference is unity under Jesus, His Word, and in a life of constant repentance in moral failure. There's room for failure, the unifying thing is taking on the Mind of Christ - standing firmly in conviction, God is right & good in his estimation of what sin & the Gospel is, leading to a lifestyle worthy of Jesus.

Christians are called to be separate concerning these things, not to geographically remove ourselves from culture, but to live a life worthy of the Gospel as citizens of heaven as we struggle under the grip of the world, as Paul says next...<sup>20</sup>*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus*

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<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 157.

*Christ, <sup>21</sup>who, 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.*

Paul's message to us is this...the way we live, our walk, appetites, the things in which we revel & our inner disposition all reveal where we are with Jesus. We should note, Paul, who had much to say about the nature of authentic faith in other places (cf. Ephesians 2:8–10; Romans 3:21, 22, 28; 10:5–13), didn't say a word about faith here. Here, lifestyle revealed the authenticity of professed belief. Taking this warning to heart is essential if we're to stand firm.<sup>7</sup>

As Paul said in 1:27: *"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ."* 'Manner of life' is more exactly 'manner of life as citizens of heaven'. The Philippians were citizens of the commonwealth of Heaven, another *city*, apart from Philippi. This was a particularly good illustration for them as a small city far out of the Roman center, but still under its influence. Likewise, they can view themselves as a Christian outpost in the world, with Christ as their true allegiance.

Ed Stetzer recently wrote in an article titled, *What It Means To Preach Jesus As Lord*, this...*"To the first-century Christians... 'Jesus is Lord' meant something far more. With Caesar as the obvious ruler of the entire known world, it wasn't only commonplace, but expected that when someone was greeted publicly, he was supposed to say, "Caesar is Lord," and to say it like he meant it...sort of the "Heil Hitler" of the day. So when the early Christians chose to say, 'Jesus is Lord' as their declaration, they were literally choosing to align everything with Jesus, even their own lives. Their words weren't trite statements. They were downright treasonous. They echoed a subversive rebellion against the establishment that clearly resonated their allegiances & alliances. Those three words changed everything."* Would we also identify with Jesus under such threat? I'd hope so.

In language, thought & lifestyle, these Philippian Christians were set apart to glorify Jesus for the sake of His mission in profoundly dangerous ways. And the future hope & result of this is a radical transformation, not just of our physical bodies, but of the whole person as a totality. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:49, *"Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."* Murray Harris writes in his classic study *Raised Immortal*: *"Paul's saying, then, that in place of an earthly body that's always characterized by physical decay, indignity & weakness, the resurrected believer will have a heavenly body that's incapable of deterioration, beautiful in form & appearance, and with limitless energy & perfect health. Once he experiences a resurrection transformation, man will know perennial rejuvenation, since he will have a perfect vehicle for God's deathless Spirit, a body that's invariably responsive to his transformed personality."*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 158.

<sup>8</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 159.

This is our future hope! Run as if to win the prize for which you've been called heavenward in Christ! Run in a way worthy of the calling you've received! The race isn't over until it's over, what's behind is behind, don't look back - stay focused on Jesus! If you've been drifting away due to the enemies influence, or feeling 'hurt' by the church, pray the Spirit leads you back, get with a trusted believer, begin to soak up Christ through them, His Word & by prayer once again. Make church fellowship, a daily quiet time in the Scriptures, and an open life of prayer & confession with others priority. Unmoored you will drift, but Christ is solid ground which anchors you in placid & stormy waters!