

Job File Name—ECF2025-10

Job Name—EVANGELICAL COMMENTARY, FALL QUARTER 2025-26 LESSON 10

Tammy Hatfield—03/15/24

RETURN TO COMMENTARY EDITOR OFFICE

Unit Theme: Letters to Philippians and Colossians

November 9, 2025 (Lesson 10)

FOCUS ON THE GOAL

- 1. Righteousness Through Christ Alone** (Philippians 3:1-11)
- 2. The Heavenly Prize** (Philippians 3:12-21)
- 3. Contentment and Giving** (Philippians 4:10-19)

Central Truth: Christians should be motivated by divine values, not secular values.

Focus: Recognize that our ultimate goal is not temporal, but everlasting, and focus on achieving that goal through Christ.

Evangelism Emphasis: All believers should prioritize reaching the lost.

Golden Text: “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

Previously in this letter, Paul addressed issues in the Philippian church brought to him via Epaphroditus, who also delivered an offering to assist him during his house arrest in Rome (see the introduction in lesson 8 for the historical setting). Paul focused on helping the church mature in their faith, which affected their actions. His three primary themes have been joy in spite of circumstances, obedience to Christ, and proper attitudes. Out of these flowed a number of other aspects of the Christian life that should be incorporated. He offered Christ Jesus as the perfect example (2:5-11).

The passages addressed in this lesson build on and reinforce Paul’s concern for the church, motivated by his love for Christ and them. He wanted them to understand the foundation on which they stood was none other than faith in the life, provision, and example of Christ Jesus.

Our attitude affects our altitude. That is, we determine our course in life through a proper perspective and mindset. Although the Apostle Paul did not use “attitude-altitude” language, he communicated the concept. He continued to remind them there is a multifaceted goal of which

believers must always be cognizant: We must continually embrace Christ and strive to be like Him so we may see Him. That is the goal we must achieve.

1. RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH CHRIST ALONE

A. No Confidence in the Flesh (Philippians 3:1-6)

³ For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. ⁴ Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: ⁵ Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Throughout this letter, Paul underscores the need to “rejoice in the Lord” (3:1). He is aware of the repetition, but understands that only in Christ can we find true joy. Thus, rejoicing is not troublesome for him (“not grievous”), as it motivates steadfastness and provides a hedge of protection (“safe”). He bluntly states there are “evil workers” whose intent is not productive (v. 2). He notes specifically that they add expectations which are not Biblically based, but taught as necessary for salvation (“concision”—literally, “mutilation”—a reference to circumcision). Believers must watch keenly (“beware”) those who falsely present themselves as teachers of Christ.

These workers opposed Paul on numerous occasions with false doctrine (see 1 Tim. 1:3-7). They included *Judaizers*, found here, who wanted to keep the Law and adhere to Old Testament practices, especially for Gentiles who came to Christ (see Acts 15); *Antinomians* (or Libertines), who were the opposite, espousing that almost nothing was prohibited (see Rom. 6:1-2); and *Quasi-Gnostics*, who taught that activity done in the body does not affect the soul (see 1 Cor. 6:15-20). History reveals variations of these and other false teachings continually challenged the early church. These false views, or variations thereof, are still present.

Paul presented the correct understanding, especially concerning circumcision (Phil. 3:3). He noted that even the Philippian believers, mostly Gentiles who did not practice this, were the true covenant people of God (“the circumcision,” see Gen. 17). The focus is not on outwardly, bodily marks (“no confidence in the flesh”; also see Col. 2:11), but on the removal of the fleshly nature with which every believer must deal (Jer. 4:4; Ezek. 44:7). He emphasized that our “worship” (service that brings glory to God) is empowered by the Holy Spirit and Christ-centered. We “rejoice” because of what “Christ Jesus” has accomplished for us—salvation through faith in His blood and not our works. It is a provision of grace, or favor we have received and embraced of which we are not worthy, nor could earn. Nothing we do can make us anymore saved (“no confidence in the flesh”). This does not mean, however, that we can absolve ourselves of any response to this gift. Paul had emphatically reminded the church of the need for obedience to God’s expectations and will (Phil. 2).

Paul turned the Judaizers’ argument around and noted if works qualify a person for the Kingdom, he could compare pedigrees with them (3:4). If anyone could rely on earthly qualifications as a means of salvation (“confidence”), Paul could. He lists seven credentials (vv. 5-6). The first four relate to identity: (1) he was circumcised on the eighth day in accordance with the Law (Lev. 12:3); (2) he was born a Jew and not a proselyte (“stock of Israel”); (3) he could trace his lineage back to Benjamin (and King Saul, for whom he was named)—a tribe (along with Judah) that did not compromise its faith during the exilic period; (4) his lineage was pure, having been born a Hebrew of Hebrew parents.

The second set of credentials relate to activity: (1) he was a Pharisee (the original holiness group), dedicated to fervent righteousness through keeping the Law; (2) his misguided enthusiasm (“zeal”) caused him to prosecute with a vengeance (“persecuting”) the called-out ones of Christ who

offended his belief system (“the church”); (3) he was without defect or fault (“blameless”) in his pursuit for legalistic, works righteousness based on the Law, including the written Law and the oral interpretations.

§ *Why must we have “no confidence in [our] flesh” (v. 3)?*

B. Faith in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:7-11)

⁷ But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: ¹⁰ That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; ¹¹ If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

After recalling his heritage and earthly qualifications, Paul observed that the previous list of supposed qualifications (“what things”) he considered to be profitable and hoped would “gain” him points with God were of no value (“loss”) in his relationship with Christ (vv. 7-8). These things could not compare with the “excellency” (that which is far above anything else) of knowing “Christ Jesus.” It is reminiscent of his Damascus-road experience, where the fervent persecutor of the church met the church’s Savior (Acts 9:1-22). Paul’s world and worldview were turned right-side up through this encounter, which guided him throughout his life and ministry. Christ became his “Lord,” who reigned supremely in his life. This relationship cost him dearly (“suffered the loss of all things”). However, he now considered these previously important things nothing but filthy excrement (“dung”), unworthy of a place in his life. His goal was to become ever increasingly like Christ (“may win”).

Still addressing the false teaching, Paul emphasized he was not in a vain pursuit for righteousness (how much is enough?), but was now firmly secure in Christ and through Him (Phil. 3:9). It was no

longer a quest for legalistic righteousness in pursuit of the Law (solely a human effort). It was now “the righteousness . . . of God” received from Christ, whereby individuals are transformed into God’s sons and daughters and made to be like Christ “by faith.” Are there expectations of us as God’s children? Yes! However, we do not live out those expectations through our ability alone, but through the power and provision of Christ and the ever-present Holy Spirit who resides within us.

Paul’s pursuit for God was found in five connected aspects (vv. 10-11). He desired to (1) increasingly “know” Christ fully and completely (see v. 8); (2) experience continually the “power of His resurrection” through the abiding power of the Spirit (see Rom. 8:11); (3) embrace the “fellowship of [Christ’s] sufferings” (Phil. 3:10) in his pursuit of knowing Christ fully (see 2:5-11). He also desired to (4) be “conformable unto [Christ’s] death”; that is, he was willing to lay down his life to be what Christ desired (see Col. 2:20; 3:3); (5) experience resurrection power. Verse 11 (“if by any means”) does not indicate doubt concerning the reality, but its timing.

Enthroning Christ

In a time of intense prayer, I had a vision of a throne room made of cold gray stone. When I invited Christ to sit on the throne of my heart, the room filled with warmth and vibrant color as He entered and took His rightful—and invited—place! Placing Christ as King of our hearts is a daily decision and pursuit.—R. Keith Whitt

2. THE HEAVENLY PRIZE

A. Pressing Forward (Philippians 3:12-16)

¹² Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be

thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Paul established the foundation of his relationship with Christ above; he now addressed the application of that relationship. The early followers of Christ called Christianity “the Way” for two reasons. First, Jesus is the only way to salvation (John 14:4, 6). Second, it emphasized the “journey” aspect of salvation (see Acts 24:14). Our relationship with God is a constant walk with Him along the pathway of life (see Gen. 3:8). We journey forward continually (2 Tim. 4:7); sometimes we stumble or wander to the edge of the path (1 Tim. 1:6), but we keep pressing forward with the goal of being like Christ (Phil. 3:10). If we stumble, we must “fall forward,” get up, dust ourselves off, and press on.

With this backdrop, Paul noted that from the time of his conversion until now (some thirty years) he had not yet succeeded or received all Christ had for him (“not . . . already attained,” v. 12). Neither was he “already perfect.” The concept of perfection can create anxiety; however, it does not mean we are flawless in everything we do. It is the pursuit of completeness or full maturity and success in striving to be like Christ (Heb. 13:21; 1 Cor. 14:20). This is the process of *sanctification* (subduing the carnal nature through spiritual means) and the pursuit of *righteousness* (right living in covenant with God). Paul’s language here—“attained,” “follow after,” “apprehend” (Phil. 3:12-13a)—clearly indicates this is a lifelong progression which originates in what Christ does in us, requires willful growth (prayer, fasting, studying the Word, sanctification, obedience) on our part, but is guided along the way by the empowerment and infilling of the Spirit (Rom. 8:26). The goal is to be like “Christ Jesus.”

The Apostle Paul utilized the imagery of an athlete to illustrate. We cannot move forward in the race (or the Way) if we are anchored to or hindered by the past (Phil. 3:13b). Paul’s Jewish

indoctrination (vv. 4-6) and the memory of persecuting the church (especially his part in Stephen's martyrdom, Acts 7:58; 8:1) could have crippled him. The grammar indicates he made a conscious decision to release himself from his past ("forgetting those things which are behind"). Things that may impede our growth must be placed under Christ's blood and left there (Heb. 9:14; Eph.1:7). He also consciously chose to energetically and with focused purpose stretch forward ("reaching forth," Phil. 3:13c) and constantly and eagerly pursue ("press toward," v. 14) the goal Christ had for him ("the mark"), as well as the reward given to the victorious at the end of the race ("prize"). The prize is not something temporal or transitory (James 5:3; 1 Peter 1:18), but the "high calling" or heavenly invitation to be in a position of favor and privilege—"in Christ Jesus."

It is possible some were teaching the Philippians that they were already perfect or complete because of salvation and no longer needed to pursue a fuller relationship with Christ. This false doctrine is prevalent today. Paul called those who thought they were mature to have the same goal he laid out through his personal pursuit of completeness in Christ ("thus minded," Phil. 3:15). If they disagreed with his position ("otherwise minded"), he was certain God would expose their false views and uncover the truth for them ("reveal"). Paul completed this passage with the call to "walk" worthy of what they had already received ("attained") and come to unity in fellowship and doctrine (v. 16).

Uphill Journey

The way to Heaven is ascending; we must be content to travel uphill, though it be hard and tiresome, and contrary to the natural bias of our flesh.—Jonathan Edwards

B. Setting an Example (Philippians 3:17-21)

¹⁷ Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. ¹⁸ (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) ²⁰ For

our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹ Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

False teachers are usually charismatic and people-oriented; that is, they seem to be larger than life and have personalities that draw people to them and their teaching. The underlying message is: “I am a great person! You are not being told the real truth. Would I lead you wrong?” One way to avoid succumbing to false teaching is to join forces with people who are founded in their faith and pay close attention to their positive example (“mark them . . . ensample,” v. 17).

False teachers were a source of great consternation for Paul (vv. 18-19). He was concerned for the souls they would lead astray and for the teachers’ souls as well. This burden was so great that it caused “weeping.” This term can indicate tears of sorrow or intense mourning that reaches into the soul. Paul observed five characteristics of these teachers: (1) They were “enemies of the cross of Christ” who preached their own gospel. (2) Their goal (“end”) was to bring chaos, which resulted in destroying both the spiritual and physical well-being of their hearers in this life and eternally. (3) They valued and were motivated only by fleshly desires and base instincts (“belly,” see Gal. 5:19-21). (4) Ironically, they idolized (“glory”) that which caused them physical and mental distress (“shame”). (5) They were motivated by and focused solely (“mind”) on the here and now (“earthly things”), rather than that which is important to Christ (see Col. 3:1-2).

Paul contrasted that mindset with that of a true follower of Christ (Phil. 3:20). “Conversation” is better understood as a wider reference to “citizenship.” In a sense, we are on loan from God to the world around us. Therefore, we must be good stewards of the time and resources with which God has entrusted us to accomplish His goals for our time in the world. Paul noted he had lived his life out daily as God’s good citizen (Acts 23:1), whereas previously (22:25) he had appealed to his Roman citizenship. This vividly reveals our dual status as citizens of the Kingdom and citizens of

the country where we live (Matt. 22:15-21). The heavenly identity always guides the earthly identity. Therefore, we follow the example of our Savior and the Lord of our lives, Jesus Christ.

God's Son will perfect us and reward our pursuit for wholeness and completeness when He transforms our frail, humbled bodies ("vile") into one having the same form as His resurrected body ("glorious body," Phil. 3:21)—eternal and incorruptible. Christ has the power and ability to bring all things under His control ("working," "able," "subdue") and bring about the culmination of the salvation process Paul emphasized throughout this epistle. As Jesus was raised from death to life, so shall we be raised (through resurrection or rapture) from this body of death to one like His (Rom. 5:10).

§ *How can we discern if a teacher/preacher is Christ's enemy in disguise?*

3. CONTENTMENT AND GIVING

A. Contented in Christ (Philippians 4:10-14)

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. ¹² I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. ¹⁴ Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

Paul finished his discourse on false teachers (4:1), addressed a matter of disagreement between two church members (vv. 2-3), returned to reasons for rejoicing (vv. 4-6), and encouraged the Philippians to focus on beneficial things (vv. 7-8). He then reminded the church to follow his example (v. 9). This is quite an admonition! A person must be certain that his or her example is exemplary and worthy to be followed to issue this directive. People are watching our example, whether we suggest it or not. The real concern is, What are they seeing?

Paul expressed his great joy and gratitude for the gift the considerate church sent (v. 10; see 2:25-30). He was always an object of their concern, even if they did not have the monetary means or opportunity to express it.

He acknowledged their love and concern, in spite of their circumstances and not a sense of expectation or entitlement (“respect of want,” 4:11). To underscore this, Paul explained he had learned to live in such a way that no matter what his circumstances may be (“whatsoever state”), “to be content.” *Content* can be translated “self-sufficient” or “complacent.” The former indicates independence, while the latter points to a state of despaired surrender. Neither of these fit here. Paul had “learned” through experience and the application of Word-centered faith that his Source was more than able to sufficiently take care of him; therefore, he did not live in distress, but was contented or encompassed in Christ. He had discovered whether he found himself in difficult, humble circumstances (“abased,” “hungry,” “suffer need”) or he had more than enough (“abound,” “full”), he was still in God’s care (v. 12). For Paul, it was not what happened *to* him that mattered, but rather what happened *in* him.

The source of his contentment and provision was not dependent on circumstances, but his faith in Christ, who enabled him (“strengtheneth”) to face what God’s will brought his way—and to do so successfully (v. 13). “All things” is a reference to those adversities mentioned in the previous verses. Certainly, God is able to help us in every aspect of our lives. However, we must be aware of the correct context when quoting this verse. Our requests and ambitions should be consistent with the example of Christ, true to the Word, and in line with God’s will for our lives (James 4:3). Paul was very grateful for the offering in his time of need and tribulation (“affliction”), but he wanted the Philippians to understand they were the instrument, not his source (Phil. 4:14). However, the instrument still gets blessed!

Contentment

Is the glass half empty or half full? Just be thankful you have a glass!—Jack Wellman

B. Fragrant Offering (Philippians 4:15-19)

¹⁷ Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. ¹⁸ But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. ¹⁹ But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul recounted his history with the Philippians and how they had been a partner with him when he first became a messenger of the Gospel to them (v. 15). Even then they provided monetary support. In fact, the offering he received at the occasion of this letter was at least the third offering from the Philippian church (v. 16).

Ever cautious of false accusations or being ascribed with wrong motives, Paul explained he was not ministering for money (“a gift,” v. 17). His focus (“desire”) was instead on “fruit” in the lives of those to whom he ministered (“your account”). He expected them to be abundantly blessed for their faithfulness.

Their offering placed him in a position of abundance and met his needs (v. 18). He did not view it as a mere monetary gift, but compared it with the Old Testament imagery of a fragrant, sacrificial offering (cf. Ex. 29:18), in conformity with God’s will for their lives (“acceptable”) that delighted God (“wellpleasing”).

Paul expressed great confidence that the Philippians’ faithfulness, costly sacrifice, and obedience would be rewarded in this life and the one to come (Phil. 4:19). Four aspects in this verse stand out. (1) Paul underscored his relationship and, hence, his partnership with God (“my God”). (2) Paul assured them their needs would be fulfilled (“supply”) through the provision of the Father’s riches, which have no end. (3) God’s provision was not limited to blessings in this life only, but extended to the future life as well (“in glory”). (4) The agency for this blessing was none other than “Christ

Jesus.” The magnitude of God’s greatness deserved nothing less than the song of praise that immediately follows: “Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen” (v. 20 NKJV).

ENTHRONING CHRIST

We are unified three-part beings: body, soul, and spirit. These are interconnected and non-divisible in activity and our present state; what is done in one affects the totality of who we are. Our pursuit to be more like Christ demands that we incorporate the principles of this lesson daily. This is the process of sanctification and the pursuit of righteousness. These intertwined qualities demand that we submit to and depend on the Word, the provision of Christ, and the power of the Spirit. Sanctification and righteousness not only address our relationship with God, but also with one another. We must be aware of others’ needs and do what we can to address them, whether those needs are spiritual or earthly. We can do no less because of what Christ has done for us.

Daily Devotions

- M. Radical Obedience (Genesis 6:13-22; Hebrews 11:7)
- T. Directed by God (Genesis 18:16-19)
- W. Unshakable Faith (Daniel 3:13-18)
- T. Let Your Light Shine (Matthew 5:13-16)
- F. Witness Without Fear (Matthew 10:17-20, 26-32)
- S. Walk in the Light (Ephesians 5:8-14)