LESSON 6 *January 31–February 6

(page 44 of Standard Edition)

Confidence Only *in* Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Phil. 3:1–16; Rom. 2:25–29; John 9:1–39; Eph. 1:4, 10; 1 Cor. 9:24–27.*

Memory Text: **"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead"** *(Philippians 3:10, 11, NKJV)***.**

There's something about us that remains suspicious about salvation by faith alone, apart from the works of the law. That is, for some reason, we all tend to lean on our works, as if they could add to our salvation. In a rather striking way, Paul deals with this point in a vigorous polemic against those who insist that circumcision is necessary for salvation.

To guard against the possibility that some might consider their works, such as circumcision, as contributing to their salvation, Paul makes it clear that righteousness is from Christ as a gift that comes by faith, not by the law. Though circumcision might not be an issue today, the principle it deals with certainly is.

The Protestant Reformation itself started over this very issue: the role of faith and works in the experience of a follower of Christ. In the end, Christ is everything to us, "the author and finisher of our faith" *(Heb. 12:2)*. If our priorities are in the right place, we will live with the assurance of God's love and enjoy the promise, even now, of salvation, all while placing "no confidence in the flesh" *(Phil. 3:3)*.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 7.*

(page 45 of Standard Edition)

Rejoicing in the Lord

Read Philippians 3:1–3. What positive and negative notes does Paul sound here, and how are they related? How does he describe believers?

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Paul begins on a very positive note and almost sounds as though he is wrapping up his letter. But he's not done. He returns to one of the main themes of this epistle: rejoicing in the Lord. And he will give a number of reasons for that here. Most important, we are to have confidence in Christ, not in ourselves: "We . . . rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" *(Phil. 3:3)*. Who among us has, in one way or another, learned the hard way about not putting confidence in the flesh?

The strong warning "Beware" (three times) is not found anywhere else in Scripture. Apparently, the Philippians knew very well what threat Paul was referencing. Rather than three separate problems, the warning appears to refer to a group of false teachers described in three different ways.

Wicked or irreligious people in Israel were sometimes referred to as "dogs" *(Phil. 3:2; compare Ps. 22:16; Isa. 56:10; Matt. 7:6; 2 Pet. 2:21, 22)*. False teachers could also aptly be described as "evil workers." Referring to them as "the mutilation" *(Phil. 3:2, NKJV)* or "those who mutilate the flesh" *(ESV)* shows that, as in Galatia and other locales, they were seeking to impose circumcision on Gentile believers, contrary to the ruling of the Apostolic Council *(see Acts 15)*.

Interestingly, it seems that one solution to spiritual challenges, including the spread of false teachings, is to "rejoice in the Lord" *(Phil. 3:1; compare Phil. 4:4)*.

Anything we *rejoice* about brings us *joy* (as in English, the two Greek words for these ideas are related). God wants us to be joyful, and His Word is a kind of instruction manual for true happiness and lasting joy. These include receiving God's mercy *(Ps. 31:7)*; placing our trust in Him *(Ps. 5:11)*; receiving the blessings of salvation *(Ps. 9:14)*; adopting God's law as our way of life *(Ps. 119:14)*, including the Sabbath *(Isa. 58:13, 14)*; believing His Word *(Ps. 119:162)*; and raising godly children *(Prov. 23:24, 25)*.

Life can be very difficult for us all, no matter how well things might be going at the moment. But even if they are not going well now, what things can you and should you rejoice about? What is stopping you from doing it?

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Paul's "Past Life"

It is a common experience for Christian converts to think of their lives in terms of before they accepted Jesus and after, just as Paul does in Philippians 3. Nevertheless, rightly or wrongly, we sometimes speak of those who are not Christians as being "good people," and, at least according to the world's standards, many indeed are. In contrast, compared to God's standards, no one is, not even Christians.

In **Philippians 3:4–6, Paul points to many things in his life of which he had once been proud. What are they? How would you describe the "good" in your own life (past and present)?**

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Paul makes an implicit contrast between believing Jews who are spreading false doctrine and uncircumcised believers who rely fully on Christ for their salvation and put no confidence in mere human works such as circumcision *(see Heb. 6:1, Heb. 9:14; compare Rom. 2:25–29)*. Even though Paul's past life and pedigree would have been quite impressive to his fellow Jews, none of these things contributed to his salvation. In fact, they actually hindered it because they blinded him for a while to his need of Christ.

Paul was not just circumcised—he was an "eighth day-er," meaning he, an Israelite by birth and belonging to the people of the covenant, was circumcised on the eighth day. Furthermore, he was from the tribe of Benjamin, whose territory included some of the most important cities of Israel. Paul not only knew Hebrew but, as a student of Gamaliel the Elder *(Acts 22:3, Acts 26:4, 5)* and a Pharisee, he would have been steeped in knowledge of the law and how it was, at least according to tradition, to be applied.

Paul was so zealous for the law that he persecuted the church because of its perceived threat to the Jewish way of life, which he thought the law prescribed. Interestingly, though "blameless" in terms of that human-originated "righteousness," Paul realized the law was actually far deeper and more demanding than he could imagine, and that without Christ he stood before it condemned.

Compare Romans 7:7–12 with Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28. What crucial point do both Jesus and Paul make about the law, and why is "faith in Christ" *(Phil. 3:9, NKJV)*, rather than the law, the only source of righteousness? Look at it this way: How well do you keep the law, at least in the way Jesus said we should?

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The Things That Matter

As yesterday's study pointed out, the things that previously made Paul proud were actually hindrances to faith because they blinded him to his need of Christ. Paul uses the language of commerce, gain and loss, to describe his spiritual ledger prior to faith. Although we don't like to think about it much, every human being has a "spiritual ledger." Previously, Paul's ledger was measured by the Jewish values of the time rather than by the biblical values as taught by Jesus.

After his conversion, his spiritual ledger looked very different because its scale of values dramatically changed, from the "currency" of Judaism to the "currency of heaven."

"He who came down from heaven can speak of heaven, and rightly present the things which form the currency of heaven, on which he has stamped his image and superscription. He knows the danger in which those are placed whom he came to uplift from degradation, and to exalt to a place beside himself upon his throne. He points out their peril in lavishing affection upon useless and dangerous objects. He seeks to draw the mind away from the earthly to the heavenly, that we may not waste time, talent, and opportunity, upon things that are altogether vanity."—Ellen G. White, in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 1, 1890.

In the world of first-century Judaism, Paul had been a rapidly rising star until, by becoming blind at the sight of the glorified Jesus on the Damascus road *(Acts 9)*, his spiritual eyesight was corrected, and he saw clearly.

John 9 tells the story of another man who was blind and then saw Jesus clearly. Jesus said He came into the world so "that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind" *(John 9:39, NKJV)***. How might this principle be applied to your own life?**

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What could be more valuable than eternal life in heaven and on the new earth? Yet worldly values blind so many to this reality. There is an inherent competition between the things valued here *(see Matt. 13:22; Luke 4:5, 6; 1 John 2:16)* and the things Heaven values—likeness to Christ and souls saved.

The world can blind us to spiritual truths and to what is really important. What is the key to keeping our eyes focused on what truly matters?

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The Faith of Christ

Paul's main point must not be missed. There was a wonderful exchange that he experienced on the Damascus road, trading his old, law-based life for the presence of Christ Himself—"that I may gain Christ and be found in Him" *(Phil. 3:8, 9, NKJV).*

To be found "in Him," that is, in Christ, is an interesting expression. Read Ephesians 1:4, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Colossians 2:9, and Galatians 2:20. Based on these passages, what do you think Paul means by this idea?

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Paul's reference to being in Christ has been widely discussed. Not surprisingly, perhaps the best explanation of it comes from Paul himself: "That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him" *(Eph. 1:10, NKJV)*. That has been God's purpose from the start. And Paul makes clear how that happens: "You are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" *(1 Cor. 1:30, NKJV).*

Being "in Christ" comprehends everything that the plan of salvation encompasses, from the dawning of our spiritual intelligence (wisdom), to justification by faith (righteousness), to preparation for heaven (sanctification), and finally to glorification at the Second Advent (redemption). Salvation is Christ's work from start to finish—for us and in us. Thus, by gaining Christ, we have everything we need.

Read Philippians 3:9. What two things does Paul contrast, and why is this contrast important to always remember?

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As Paul came to realize, having one's "own righteousness" is not real righteousness because the law cannot give life *(see Gal. 3:21, 22)*; only Christ can, through faith. And not just any faith. After all, the devils believe and tremble *(James 2:19)*. The only saving faith is "the faith of Christ." Only *His* faith has obeyed fully and can obey. (The Greek word for faith, *pistis*, also means faithfulness.) So, if we are in Christ and He lives in us *(Gal. 2:20)*, then we live by *His* faith through our faith in Him.

Just One Thing—Knowing Christ

Read Philippians 3:10–16. What are some of the main points Paul makes in this passage?

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Surely there is nothing more important than knowing Christ, which guarantees in the end that He will know us and acknowledge us before the Father *(see Matt. 7:21–23; Matt. 10:32, 33)*. How do we know Him? Through His Written Word—reading it and living it. We cannot know Him face-to-face as the disciples did. But interestingly, despite that knowledge, they still failed to comprehend His words, underscoring our need of the Holy Spirit to guide us *(see John 16:13)*. The more we know Him, the closer we come to Him, because we experience "the power of His resurrection" *(Phil. 3:10)*, which raises us to "newness of life" *(Rom. 6:4, NKJV)*.

Another way we come closer to Jesus is through "the fellowship of His sufferings" *(Phil. 3:10, NKJV)*. Every trial faced, every painful experience borne, helps us to know and appreciate more what Jesus went through for us, and also to understand Him and His will more clearly.

A third way we come closer is by pressing onward "toward the goal" *(Phil. 3:14, NKJV)*. What is that goal? It translates a word used only here in the New Testament (*skopos*). It refers to the finish line of a race and the prize awarded the victor. Paul calls it "the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" *(Phil. 3:14, NKJV)*. Just as Christ, through His death and resurrection, ascended upward to heaven, God invites us to receive the same heavenly reward—eternal life.

Obviously, we have not attained that yet. We will not be perfected in the fullest sense until our "lowly body" is transformed "that it may be conformed to His glorious body" *(Phil. 3:21, NKJV)*. But by knowing Him and inviting His presence into our lives every day, we press on toward the goal of being like Jesus in every way possible now. This is the "one thing" Paul focused on, too. Just like running a race *(see 1 Cor. 9:24–27)*, we pay no attention to where we've been or who trails us. Our single focus is on the things that lie ahead—that heavenly prize that awaits us. The image here is vivid: a runner's full focus on the goal, straining every muscle and leaning forward to reach the finish line.

Why, in your walk with the Lord, is it so important not to keep looking back, at least back at your sins and failures, but instead to look ahead to what you have been promised right now in Christ?

Further Thought: "He who would build up a strong, symmetrical character, he who would be a well-balanced Christian, must give all and do all for Christ; for the Redeemer will not accept divided service. Daily he must learn the meaning of self-surrender. He must study the word of God, learning its meaning and obeying its precepts. Thus he may reach the standard of Christian excellence. Day by day God works with him, perfecting the character that is to stand in the time of final test. And day by day the believer is working out before men and angels a sublime experiment, showing what the gospel can do for fallen human beings."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 483.

"Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, 'Behold your God.' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

"The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Dwell more on this question of rejoicing in the Lord. Notice that it is not saying to rejoice in your trials (though that's biblical too) but in the Lord. Why is it so important to always keep before us the Lord, His goodness, His power, His love, and His salvation? How would doing that greatly benefit you amid the inevitable trials of life?

❷ Notice how the above quotations describe the role of grace in producing the "good works" we do as Christians. Why is this function of grace so important as we look forward to the soon coming of Christ? That is, though we are not saved by good works, are we really saved if we don't have them?

❸ Dwell more on this idea of not having confidence in the flesh. What does that mean? Why should we not have confidence in it? Is not our flesh a gift from God?

Unexpected Church Visit

Gilbert Fimaka woke up on a Sunday with a strong desire to go to church.

The 22-year-old medical missionary shared his longing with his roommate, a fellow medical missionary. The two young men were just wrapping up a three-week mission trip in rural Zambia.

"I'm thinking about visiting a church here," Gilbert said. "I'd like to share the Word of God and also tell them about the seventh-day Sabbath."

Then he laughed. His roommate also laughed. The idea seemed preposterous. But in his heart, Gilbert wanted to go. So, he went.

As he entered the closest church, he felt nervous. He knew that he couldn't just say, "This is not the day of worship."

To his surprise, the church members quickly made him feel at home. Many recognized him from his medical work, and they welcomed him warmly. They even gave him a seat of honor with the church leaders.

Then it was time for the sermon. To Gilbert's surprise, he was invited to preach. He felt humbled as he approached the pulpit, but he was scared to talk about the Sabbath. So, he opened his Bible to the book of Job.

As Gilbert spoke, he heard a voice say, "Talk about the Sabbath." He ignored it and continued preaching. The voice spoke a second time.

When the voice spoke a third time, Gilbert turned in his Bible to Leviticus 23:3 and read, "Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings" *(NKJV)*. Then he read Matthew 28:1 and Genesis 2:1–3.

"The seventh day does not fall on a Sunday but on a Saturday, so the true day of worship is not Sunday but Saturday," he said.

When he finished the sermon, a church leader stood up and announced, "I will stop worshiping on Sunday and only worship on Saturday."

As people left the church, many talked loudly. Some were weeping. "We didn't know that we were worshiping on the wrong day," said one. "From now on, we will worship on Saturday," said another.

A short time later, the church leader was baptized in a Seventh-day Adventist church, and many other church members began studying the Bible in preparation for baptism.



This mission story illustrates the "Mission For All" objective of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, which says in part, "Christ mingled, showed sympathy, ministered to needs, won confidence, then invited people to follow Him. The goal is to take a genuine interest in people, leading them to Christ and inviting them to unite with the Seventh-day Adventist Church as disciples of Christ who make disciples." Read more at IWillGo.org.

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Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Philippians 3:10, 11*

Study Focus: *Philippians 3*

After asserting that believers shine in this world by performing Christ-centered good works, Paul now shifts attention to the necessity of trusting solely in Christ for salvation. The apostle expresses concern about the influence of false teachers who were promoting a flesh-based approach, thereby distorting the gospel message and endangering the entire Christian community in Philippi. It seems that a form of false teaching, similar to that in Galatia, was creating some confusion regarding what Gentile Christians were supposed to believe and do in order to be saved.

Paul took this matter very seriously. After all, the gospel message was at stake! Paul is so extremely concerned about the infiltration of false masters and their teachings that he refers to them as dogs and evil workers *(Phil. 3:2, NKJV)*. These are strong terms, used to express contempt and disapproval. By addressing these issues in Philippi, Paul provides precious lessons on how to deal with false teachings. These lessons are crucial for the church today. After all, to a greater or lesser degree, all our churches suffer the attack of false teachers.

This week's lesson emphasizes three major themes:

1. Rejoicing in the Lord is the opposite of relying on human strength.
2. A genuine conversion leads to a radical change, from confidence in the flesh to confidence in Christ.
3. Knowing Christ is a progressive experience. As we draw closer to Him, our intimacy with Him will deepen more and more. One's intimacy with Christ must continue to grow until the day we see Him face-to-face.

Part II: Commentary

Illustration

"The king of Italy and the king of Bohemia promised John Huss safe transport and safe custody. They broke their promises, however, and Huss was martyred. Thomas Wentworth carried a document signed by King Charles I which read, 'Upon the word of a king you shall not suffer in

life, honour, or fortune.' Shortly afterwards, however, his death warrant was signed by the same monarch. 'Put not your trust in princes,' were his last words. 'It is better to trust in the Lord' than in anyone or anything else."—Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), p. 1525.

Rejoicing in the Lord Versus Confidence in the Flesh

In Philippians 3:1–3, Paul introduces a warning against pride in human achievements. The exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord," in verse 1 expresses a concept that is often found in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Psalms. A few remarkable examples include: "The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice" *(Ps. 21:1, NKJV)*; "Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous" *(Ps. 32:11, NKJV)*; "Let the righteous one rejoice in the LORD" (Ps. 64:10, ESV; compare with Ps. 97:12); "Rejoice the soul of Your servant" *(Ps. 86:4, NKJV)*; "For you have made me rejoice, LORD" *(Ps. 92:4, CSB)*; "May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD" *(Ps. 104:34, ESV)*; "The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced" *(Ps. 126:3, NRSV)*. In fact, rejoicing in the Lord is a commandment repeatedly highlighted throughout the book of Deuteronomy *(see Deut. 12:7, 12, 18; Deut. 14:26; Deut. 16:11, 15; Deut. 26:11; Deut. 27:7)*.

In Philippians 3:1–3, the idea of rejoicing occurs twice in some English translations—"rejoice in the LORD" *(Phil. 3:1)* and "rejoice in Christ Jesus" *(Phil. 3:3, NKJV, etc.)*. However, the original text in Greek uses two different words. In Philippians 3:1, Paul employs the term *chairō*, which the New Testament frequently portrays happiness and well-being. On the other hand, in Philippians 3:3, Paul uses the term *kauchaomai*, which the King James Version regularly translates as "boasting," both in Romans *(see Rom. 2:17, 23)*, and especially in 2 Corinthians, where it is also translated as "glory" or "glorying" *(2 Cor. 5:12; 2 Cor. 7:14; 2 Cor. 9:2; 2 Cor. 10:8, 13, 15, 16; 2 Cor. 11:12, 16, 18, 30; 2 Cor. 12:1, 5, 6, 9, 11)*. The verb *kauchaomai* conveys a more nuanced sense of exultation than does *chairō*.

Therefore, the original text translated as "rejoice in Christ Jesus" in Philippians 3:3 also could be translated as "boast in Christ Jesus" *(as in the NRSV)* or "glory in Christ Jesus" *(as in the ESV)*. Paul uses a strong word in order to make it clear that confidence in Christ and reliance on human efforts are mutually exclusive: one thing naturally invalidates the other! In this sense, Paul's expression is very similar to what he says in Galatians 6:13, 14. Paul reproves those who boast in the flesh *(Gal. 6:13)* and affirms that the only reason for his boasting is the cross of Christ *(Gal. 6:14)*.

Paul uses the term "flesh" in Philippians 3:3 to refer to human efforts performed with the goal of obtaining salvation. However, in the words of the New English Translation, when it comes to salvation, we "do not rely on human credentials" *(Phil. 3:3, NET)*. Indeed, we completely depend on Christ's credentials. This idea is likely what Paul meant when saying that we boast in Christ. Rejoicing "in the Lord" *(Phil. 3:1, NKJV)* and boasting "in Christ Jesus" *(Phil. 3:3, NRSV)* are parallel concepts, just as in Psalm 34:2: "My soul will make its boast in the LORD; the humble will hear it and rejoice" *(NASB)*.

From Confidence in the Flesh to Confidence in Christ

The warning against pride in human achievements, introduced in Philippians 3:1–3, is developed in Philippians 3:4–6. One should notice that the phrase "confidence in the flesh" is a key expression in Philippians 3:1–6 *(NKJV)*. It occurs no fewer than three times. As mentioned previously, in Philippians 3:3, Paul contrasts confidence in the flesh with boasting in Christ. In Philippians 3:4, the apostle contends that no other Jew had as much confidence in the flesh as he did. In Philippians 3:5, 6, he presents seven reasons why he, more than anybody else, could have confidence in the flesh: (1) "circumcised the eighth day," (2) "of the stock of Israel," (3) "of the tribe of Benjamin," (4) "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," (5) a Pharisee, (6) persecutor of the church, and (7) blameless. Interestingly, circumcision opens the list, whereas blamelessness concludes it. It seems Paul believed his efforts would secure his salvation. However, upon meeting Christ, he realized the ineffectiveness of his achievements to get saved.

In Philippians 3:7–9, Paul contrasts his post-conversion life with his pre-converted experiences, as described previously. The terms "gain" and "loss" stand out in this short passage. Verses 7 and 8 are arranged in a concentric order, as follows:

A. "What things were **gain** to me" *(Phil. 3:7a, NKJV)*,
  B. "I have counted **loss** for Christ" *(Phil. 3:7b, NKJV)*.
  B' "I also count all things **loss**" *(Phil. 3:8a, NKJV),*
A' that I may **gain** Christ" *(Phil. 3:8b, NKJV)*.

This concentric structure, also known as chiastic structure, emphasizes the radical change in Paul's mindset. In addition to the term "loss" (from the Greek *zēmia*), Paul also uses its verbal form, "to suffer loss" (from the Greek *zēmioō*), in Philippians 3:8. This accentuation makes the emphasis on the change of his mindset even more remarkable. The items in the sevenfold list of autobiographical boasting are considered as loss in light of "the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" *(Phil. 3:8, NKJV)*. The knowledge of Christ brought all things in Paul's early life into the right perspective. Paul turned from confidence in the flesh to confidence

in Christ *(Phil. 3:8)*, from a law-focused righteousness to a Christ-centered righteousness, completely dependent on faith in God's grace *(Phil. 3:9)*.

Knowing Christ Is a Progressive Experience

In Philippians 3:10, Paul indicates that the ultimate purpose of his life was to know Christ. The fact that he mentions Christ's sufferings, death, and resurrection suggests that knowing Christ involves not only a cognitive but, especially, a relational experience in a process of gradual growth *(see also 2 Pet. 3:18)*. While this idea is somehow implicit in Philippians 3:10, Paul further elaborates on this thought in Philippians 3:12–16.

Moreover, Paul is aware that a more complete knowledge of Christ will be attained only in the resurrection *(Phil. 3:10, 11)*. This idea seems to be the context for the statement in Philippians 3:12: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected" *(NKJV)*. Next, Paul explains how he pursues the goal described in Philippians 3:10, 11, by suggesting that the task is twofold: (1) he forgets "those things which are behind," and (2) he reaches forward to "those things which are ahead" *(Phil. 3:13, NKJV)*. However, one thing does not disassociate from the other. In fact, Paul refers to these two things as a single action, when saying "one thing I do" *(Phil. 3:13, NKJV)*. This one thing is driven by a clear purpose: to pursue "the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" *(Phil. 3:14, NKJV)*. The prize and the call refer to the same thing, as in the Good News Translation: "The prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus." They are most likely metaphors for the resurrection, at which time Paul will fully know Christ. Until then, believers are called to keep growing in the knowledge of Christ as they pursue the prize *(Phil. 3:15, 16)*.

Part III: Life Application

Meditate upon the following themes. Then ask your students to answer the questions at the end of the section.

The Bible clearly teaches that our salvation does not depend on our own efforts. This teaching is a compelling reason to rejoice in the Lord day by day. After all, if salvation were dependent on our good works, we wouldn't have any hope! From a biblical perspective, joy is our response to what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Things may not go as well as we wish or expect. Yet, we have reasons to rejoice, as so beautifully expressed in the song of Habakkuk: "I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" *(Hab. 3:18, NKJV)*.

In the life of a true believer, there is no room for pride in human achievements. When one understands that salvation is not dependent on what we

can do but depends completely on what God has done and is doing for us in Christ, those things considered gain are now deemed as loss, "for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ" *(Phil. 3:8, NKJV)*. Christlikeness becomes the aim of one's pursuit, and good works naturally come as a result. As Paul affirms elsewhere, "For we are His [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" *(Eph. 2:10, NKJV)*.

As Christians, we are a work in progress. This notion is what Paul meant in the thanksgiving section of his letter to the Philippians when he said, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" *(Phil. 1:6, NKJV)*. Until that day comes, we must forget "those things which are behind" and reach forward to "those things which are ahead" *(Phil. 3:13, NKJV)*!

Questions:

1. **Think more on the idea that our salvation isn't dependent on our own good works. Why is this teaching such good news? Why should this inspire us with hope?**

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2. **Many people are stuck in a spiral of self-loathing and recrimination for their past sins. Though they intellectually accept Christ's forgiveness, they have yet to internalize it. As a result, they cannot fully let go of the past. Think more about the idea that we must forget "those things which are behind" and reach forward to "those things which are ahead" *(Phil. 3:13, NKJV)*. What astonishing permission does this command give us? Why is this directive so liberating and healing to the human heart?**

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