



Philippians 3:13-14 “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.”

Introduction: Everyone can have a new beginning because of Jesus and the Gospel! Grace is all about how old can become new! There are so many examples in the New Testament of the Gospel changing lives, and one of the most prominent is Paul the Apostle! Paul’s conversion to Christianity and many of his missionary endeavors are recorded for us in the book of Acts. Then, a majority of the rest of the New Testament are letters written by Paul to other believers. In some of these letters, Paul gives his testimony, and in each instance he emphasizes a different aspect of his story. Here in Philippians, Paul focuses on his identity before his conversion. Prior to believing in Jesus, Paul was trusting in his own righteousness to get to God. Paul came to understand that his works could not save him, and that he needed the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus.

Philippians 3:7-9 “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.”

I’m thankful for the new beginning of salvation! I’m also thankful for the continued blessings of grace and forgiveness that allows me to keep experiencing new beginnings and second chances! In the book of Philippians, Paul reaffirms his commitment to his calling as an apostle and a life of following Jesus. He does this while acknowledging some of the areas where we so often struggle in our faith—guilt over sins of the past, doubt because of trials in the present, and fear because of the uncertainties in the future.

I. A New Beginning Despite Sins of the Past

Paul struggled with guilt over past sins just like we all do!

1 Timothy 1:15 *“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”*

Philippians 3:4-6 *“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.”*

What were the sins of his past that Paul struggled with?

A. Self-Righteousness

Paul was a Pharisee and before his conversion, he acted like a Pharisee. The picture painted of Pharisees is not a pretty one, and if Paul was anything like his peers, he looked down on others and had no interest in helping people!

Matthew 9:10-12 *“And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners. 12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”*

This was Paul's identity before Christ! The Gospel changed all that!

1 Timothy 1:14 *“And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”*

What a transformation! Paul went from Pharisee to preacher! That is the change that Jesus makes!

B. Violence

Paul was a “persecutor of the church”, which meant that he was responsible for the imprisonment and execution of Jesus' followers.

Acts 8:1-3 *“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried*

Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.”

He was able to justify this cruelty because of his self-righteousness and because he had the support of the state.

Can you imagine the guilt that Paul dealt with over his actions? Can you understand why he would feel so unworthy?

We can all relate to this feeling because we have been there! While grace does not deliver us from the consequences of our action, it does make it so that we do not have to be defined by those consequences. We can let go of the sins of the past and let God work through us in the way that only He can!

II. A New Beginning Despite Trials in the Present

Philippians is what we refer to as a “prison epistle” because Paul wrote it from inside a jail cell.

Philippians 1:7 *“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.”*

It is while sitting in chains that Paul reaffirms his commitment to following Jesus and living a life of faithfulness!

Philippians 3:12-14 *“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.*

Where did this determination come from?

A. The Faithfulness of God

Paul had been in prison before, and God had delivered him before!

Acts 16:25-26 *“25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. 26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.*

Don't forget in the night what God showed you in the light!

B. *The Furtherance of the Gospel*

Paul was willing to have the faith to believe that God could use his suffering to further the message of the Gospel!

Philippians 1:12-14 *"12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; 13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; 14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

Would you be willing to pray this prayer in the middle of your suffering? "Lord, magnify your name and draw people to yourself through this trial in my life!"

C. *The Development of Spiritual Maturity*

Seasons of difficulty can be times of tremendous growth and development if we have a spiritual mindset.

Philippians 4:13 *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."*

This is a very familiar verse and is often used in a very flippant way. The truth is, this statement reflects spiritual growth and maturity. Paul had been through things, and those experiences have taught him lessons that made him a more faithful Christ follower.

Philippians 4:6-12 *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. 9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. 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."*

III. A New Beginning Despite the Uncertainties of the Future

The future is uncertain which is what makes it scary. Paul had no more knowledge of the future than we do, and yet he lived with hope and confidence. He did not allow the uncertainty of the future to keep him from taking steps of faith!

Philippians 3:14 *“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”*

How was Paul able to move forward into the future with faith?

A. *The Security of Salvation*

Paul’s ultimate hope was in Jesus!

Philippians 1:6 *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:”*

Our salvation is not attained by our works and it is not maintained by our works. Salvation is God’s work!

B. *The Promise of Resurrection*

Philippians 1:20-24 *“According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. 23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: 24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”*

Philippians 3:11 *“If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”*

Paul had hope in a life beyond this life!

C. *The Certainty of Jesus’ Return*

The future is uncertain, but one thing is certain—Jesus is coming again!

Philippians 3:20-21 *“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.”*

