

A New Year's Goal
Philippians 3:4-16
Pastor Tyler Curtis, December 30, 2018

Well, it's good to be with you guys here this morning. It's a privilege to be back, so many familiar faces. I think it was about over two years ago that Krista and I came up and were with you guys. And it's just fun to be back and see how the church has grown, and hear through the grapevine, through Jeremy and other means, how things are going up here in Chilliwack. Krista and I and family, we don't live too far away. We are just at the border. Lynden, we live in Lynden. And so, it's not too far of a jog for us to come up here. I'm pastoring as an associate pastor down in Bellingham at Spring Creek Bible Church. I'm down there with three other pastors, two of whom also attended The Master's Seminary. And so, it's a sweet thing to be pastoring with brothers, and then to be able to come up here and share the pulpit with Jeremy who's also an alumnus of TMS. And it's just neat to see all the things that the Lord has been knitting together in the Lower Mainland and in Washington State.

I didn't realize how many connections ... I used to live in the Vancouver area years ago ... I didn't realize how many connections there were to Washington State. And now that I'm in Washington, it's like, "Wow, there's all these neat connections, people crossing the border and doing church together." And so, now, we're part of that international connection with the Lower Mainland. So, it's fun to be here with you guys. I'd love to visit with you afterward.

But it's especially fun to be with you here on the last Sunday of the year ... the last Sunday of the year. We're about to hit New Year's and 2019 is upon us. Here it is. It's a fresh start and it's at this time that people start to think of New Year's resolutions. I'm sure you're already thinking about something. Maybe you've got something percolating in your mind. I think one of the most popular changes to make is probably diet, right? People say, "Okay, I got to change something about how I eat." It's this time of year that you see all these advertisements for like workout stuff and diet fads and health pills and all these things, because the advertisers know, the companies know that this is the time when people are most likely to implement some kind of a change in their life. Lifestyles can get a little out of hand over time. We're not always diligent, we're not always faithful to stay on top of things. So, the New Year is kind of like this new start where people can reset and start again in the right direction. I could stand to make a resolution about what I eat. Krista reminds me that I'm not 20-years-old anymore, and I got to be careful. Maybe you're in the same boat as me, I don't know. But perhaps, you're making some kind of a resolution this year. Maybe you need to turn over a new leaf of some sort.

Well, there was a man some time ago in the media realm that was turning over a new leaf himself. And this guy was kind of a high profile person, and you would probably know who he is. His name is Mark Zuckerberg. Anybody know who Zuckerberg is? Yeah, Facebook CEO, right? So, Mark Zuckerberg, he didn't make a resolution or turn over a new leaf about diet or anything, but he turned over a new leaf in religion. If you would have visited his personal Facebook page before this happened, you would've seen in his "about" tab that he was a self-proclaimed atheist. He didn't believe in the existence of God.

Well, just before Christmas in 2016 (so this is going back a couple of years ago), he posted a short message on Facebook wishing his followers a Merry Christmas and a Happy Hanukkah. To which one of his fans challenged him, saying, “Aren't you an atheist man? Like what up? What's going on?” And Zuckerberg responded, he actually, whatever, messaged back or put it on his wall or however that stuff works. I'm not a big Facebook guy, maybe some of you are. But he did whatever. He responded and he said, “No, I was raised Jewish and then I went through a period where I questioned things. But now, I believe religion is very important. Religion is very important,” he said. Mark turned over a new leaf. He made a change, he shifted priorities. But absent of a heart change, a transformation that is sovereignly brought about by the work of God, this regard for religion is of little present value and zero eternal value. Absent the Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ, it's really worthless. Religion is worthless.

Well, in the text that we're going to examine this morning, the apostle Paul explains how he once had a similar regard for religion. He thought it was important. It was only external, but to him, it was extremely important. You can turn with me (or maybe you're already there) to Philippians chapter 3. We read it this morning and I've been debating on whether or not to go reread it again. It was great. But, you know what, I'm just going to read it again. So, follow with me in Philippians chapter 3:4-16, and then we'll dig into the text. It says this,

4 If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained *it* or already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this text from Your servant, the apostle Paul so many years ago. It is valuable to us today just as it was valuable to the original readers and hearers. It's inspired, it's infallible, inerrant, and it is powerful because it's Your living and active word. And so, we pray, Lord, that as we dig into it today, that we would glean and appropriate some things from it for

ourselves, for this year so that we best can glorify You and live a full and abundant Christian life in 2019. I pray this in the name of Jesus, amen.

So, just to give you a little bit of a roadmap this morning about where we're going, I want us to see two pictures of Paul, one of religious Paul and one of transformed Paul. And then I want to look at some takeaways for us this year and the message following that directs our lives, our goals, our plans for the next year. So, two pictures of Paul, and then we're going to drill in, after doing this flyover of verses 4 to 11, kind of drill in a bit on 12 to 16. We're not going to be able to go all the way into the text. This is a large piece. It's rich, it's full of stuff. I'm going to have to leave some things behind, but we're just going to pull out some really important things for us in 2019 in our lives all the time, really.

So, here's a picture of old Paul to begin with. He felt secure in his externals. And beginning halfway through verse 4, he writes, "If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews." Summary here: Paul says, he's got all the markings of a good religious guy. He inherited the right customs from his parents. He was from the right country, he even was from the right part of the country that was loyal to the right king - King David. He was not a proselyte to Judaism, not a new arrival, maybe like a Greek or a Roman who might have converted to Judaism later in life. But he'd been a Jew from the beginning, and Paul had been born into all the right stuff. To put it in rough and ready modern terms, he was born on the right side of the tracks in the right social structure, faithful allegiances to the right leadership.

So, he was in the right family, and maybe you could say he was even in the right church if we were to say things like that. And I'm not saying that that was the church back then, but if we were to put it into modern terms, we can identify with that. Maybe having grown up in the church, some people would say that, "Oh, I'm from the right church." Well, Paul's from the right church. He had all the right stuff just handed to him. And he continues in verse 5.

"As to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." So, beyond just being handed everything at birth and coming into the right family, being part of the right tribe, everything, he also did everything that he thought was right. And he did so zealously, passionately. He held himself to the highest religious standards. He was so passionate about Judaism that he fought everyone who taught differently. And according to all the externals, all the outside stuff of Judaism, he says he was faultless in the law. He saw himself as being righteous. He was being righteous.

Of course, we know that God's true standard of righteousness is that you are to be what? Perfect. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect - Matthew 5:48. And James 2:10 says that, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he's become guilty of all." We need to plug that into Paul's framework there, of his old Judaistic lifestyle and that really would have condemned him. But he saw himself from the externals as having all the right stuff. But Paul was guilty. Paul was guilty. Even if he had thought he had kept every law, he failed even at the first commandment, right? "You shall have no other gods before Me." - Exodus 20:3.

Because in a self-righteousness, Paul had installed himself as a God, right? He had installed himself as a God. He had elevated himself, trusted in himself, and in a way, he'd even worshiped himself. Spiritual pride is self-worship. If you trust in your own merits, you place yourself on the throne of God and you belittle His holiness. And this is everybody's default position, really. This is our go-to. We are self-exalters, we're self-worshippers. And even if we are saved in Christ, even if we are regenerated people, our flesh still pulls us back over there, doesn't it? We still want to be self-exalters. We still want to trust in our own righteousness that we try to muster up.

This was Paul's default position too, and he was unregenerate at this place. And so, he was in a really bad spot, really bad spot. But something happened to Paul that rattled everything loose. All his self-confidence and self-righteousness was shaken. Look at verse 7. He writes, "But whatever things were gained to me ..." all these externals, all these things that he had talked about, being of the right tribe, doing all the right things in Judaism, those things "I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." Paul encountered the righteousness of the living Christ and his own righteousness paled in comparison. It was pathetic.

He was confronted on the road to Damascus. Do you remember the story in Acts chapter 9? He was approaching Damascus and the resurrected Christ Jesus appeared to Him in a blinding light and called him sovereignly to Himself. Christ took this enemy, this Paul, and He made him His own. And in light of that transformation, everything changed. Everything changed. It was a supernaturally wrought change. Not an external change, not about just doing something different, not about just trying harder. It was a supernatural internal heart change.

This is the Gospel. This is the Gospel. Paul received the Gospel of Christ. He saw that everything that he was doing up to that point was garbage and dirt and filth, and he said, "Wow! Christ, wow! I want You, because I see everything that I've done up to this point is nothing. You are everything. Your righteousness is everything. You are the Lord."

I think that some in our Christian circles, especially those who grow up in the church ... I was one of them. I grew up in the church. At one point, I thought that I was saved and I did all the right stuff on the outside. I followed through all the steps. I went to church, I went to Sunday school. We did family devotions, and I just rode my parents' coattails. And that's a danger for those who grow up in the church. It's a danger for those also who say, "Hey, I just want to turn over a new leaf with religion. I'm going to make myself better here. I'm going to start going to church and I'm going to start going through the rote actions of Christianity." And they've never submitted their heart to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's a danger. That's a real danger in Christian circles.

So, I don't know where you're at this morning. I don't know if this is you. I trust that most people here have received the Gospel of Jesus Christ, have repented of their sins, and have embraced Him, shunned their own self-righteousness, and embraced Christ as the only way to the Father. I trust that you have, but if you haven't, consider it. Consider it this day. And this is why we need to keep bringing the Gospel back to our kids too, because we don't know where they stand. Keep bringing it back to them to trust in Christ and bring about a heart change.

The way Paul describes his change in verse 7, he puts it in like accounting terms. All of his assets, all of his achievements according to the flesh, which were once in the profit column, they all moved into the loss column. So think about it, it wasn't that before Christ, everything was just a big fat zero. It actually went into the negative column. It's like if you checked your bank account one morning, and the day before it had been a million bucks and you wake up the next day and it's negative a million bucks. That's kind of what Paul's saying here. His religious assets, they actually started working against him, he says. It's because verses 8 and 9 say that, when it comes to the surpassing value of knowing Christ and having His righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, your former assets, Paul's former assets tempt you to rely on them instead of the perfect righteousness of Christ.

That's a temptation. That could've been a temptation for Paul, that could be a temptation for us. You're tempted to say, "Maybe I'm not as bad as that guy over there or I've done so much for the church, or I have good family and I contribute to society." Again, falling back to our default position. But all of that belittles and diminishes our Saviour, the all surpassing valuable one.

So, here's the second picture of Paul in verse 8. Paul is united to Christ. Paul is in Christ, in union with Him. And the result, he takes all of his liabilities to the trash heap, chuck's them out. He doesn't put faith in them. He calls them rubbish. In fact, the Greek uses a stronger word to describe these things. My Greek professor used to use this word in class and he'd scream it out at people when somebody gave him a false argument. He'd just scream it out, *skubalon, skubalon!* It sounds like maybe like a guy in a wet suit laying in his front yard – *skubalon!* But it actually means "dung". It means "excrement". Paul regards all his former achievements as little more than waste. He counts them as that for the purpose of gaining Jesus. And that's because human achievement according to the law and righteousness through faith in Christ are mutually exclusive.

Hypothetically, you can have one but you can't have the other along with it. And I say hypothetically, because we know that no man can actually live up to the law. Galatians 2:16 reads by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified. So, really, you can only be justified by faith. You can try to be justified by the law. That's a hypothetical way to get there, but we know that we'll never attain it. And so, righteousness through faith in Christ is the only way.

But human works can hamper justification by faith. And this is why Paul tosses them aside and he clings to Christ. And this is why Paul also kind of screams at the Galatians in Galatians chapter 3, and he says, "You foolish Galatians, you started in the Spirit, started justification in the Spirit and now you're thinking that you can be justified, continue to be perfected in the flesh. Like guys, come on. This is craziness." So, he flings it aside.

In verse 10 and 11, he tells us that Christ is not just meant for fire insurance, but Christ died for a greater purpose than just to save sinners from hell. And verse 10 and 11 read, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." So, what does that mean? It means that God saved you through Jesus Christ so that you may know His Son and the fullness of all the blessings. That word "know" in the original has a greater meaning than just knowledge, than just that head knowledge of facts. It's experiential knowledge. It's experiential

knowledge. It's intimate knowledge. It's firsthand knowing Him. It means union with Christ, being joined to Him.

Sinclair Ferguson writes this about union with Christ. He says this, "If we are united to Christ, then we are united to Him at all points of activity, of His activity on our behalf. We share in His death, in His burial, in His resurrection, in His ascension, in His heavenly session, and we will share in His promised return." He goes on to say, "This then is the foundation of sanctification. It is rooted not in humanity and their achievements of holiness, but what God has done in Christ and for us in union with Him."

So, Paul's being in union with Christ through faith (verses 9 and 10), being joined to Him in faith, is the cornerstone, it's the basis, the foundation for life experienced in Christ. And let me say that a bit differently. Your faith and trust in the work and the person of Jesus, is the foundation for what you will experience in the Christian life.

So, how should union with Christ affect our lives? Let me give you a paraphrase of how the theologian Louis Berkhof explains the doctrine of the union with Christ. He says this, "Union with Christ is a transforming union. By this union, believers are changed into the image of Christ according to His human nature." That just means that we don't become God, we're just a human replica of Him. And he goes on to say, "What Christ affects in His people is a reproduction of what took place in Him. They are credited, but also experience. They experience His sufferings, bearing of the cross, His crucifixion, death, and raising to new life with Him. They share in a measure the experiences of their Lord." So, not only crediting to our accounts, the works of Jesus, but also experiencing them and experiencing of them. And this is like what Jesus said in Mark chapter 8:34, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." Galatians 2:20, similarly, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." So, the Christian in his intimate union with Christ comes to know self-denial, shunning of sin, and lives a life to emulate His Saviour. Romans 12:1 reminds us, this is a reasonable act of service in light of the great things that Christ has done for us, His great mercies

So, then the second picture of Paul and the point I want to drive to, and what we'll see in the next five verses, is that the goal of the Christian, your New Year's resolution will say, if you will, should be Christ-likeness. Transformation of the heart leads to Christ-likeness, becoming like the one with whom you have union. So, as we examine these next five verses of Philippians chapter 3, I want you to see that it gives you three keys to your quest this year in Christ-likeness. Three keys to your quest.

The first one is know your state. Know your state versus your position. Look at verse 12. Verse 12 says, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Somebody in Philippi reading this letter up to this point might have begun to think that Paul was saying that he had already attained Christ-likeness. After all, he had counted all things lost for the sake of Christ and suffered the loss of all things. And there were some Christians, there are some Christians and circles today that say that you actually can attain a perfection, a Christian

perfectionism in this life, cease to sin. But so far, I haven't found this true in my life (you can ask my wife), and I trust that you don't find that to be true in yours either. And if you think you have, we need to talk after the service. But Paul wanted to make it clear that he hadn't got there either. He's not there yet. He hadn't obtained it, or as we might say today, he hadn't arrived. He hadn't arrived. Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, the one who wrote a large portion of our New Testament, he had not arrived at a perfect Christ-likeness. He was still subject to temptation, still possessed his unredeemed flesh. He was still a sinner. And he would later write in First Timothy chapter 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among whom I am for most of all."

But Paul knew of a day that he would be perfect. He tells the Corinthian church in his first letter to them, that their bodies would be perfected. In chapter 15:51, "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." Perfect in body, but also perfect in sinlessness. The Apostle John says in First John 3:2, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we see Him just as He is." And that hope exists for all believers because they have been laid hold of by Christ.

Look back at verse 12. It says, "I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ." That's kind of an awkward wording in the NAS. I don't know if that's what you're reading out of. I prefer the NAS because it does a pretty good job of maintaining the form and function of the translation. But this sounds awkward. I think the ESV gets it more clearly. If you've got the ESV there, it's just clear. It just says, "Because". It says, "Because I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me His own." Paul acts because he has been apprehended by Christ. He was in the position of being in Him or being in Christ because Christ had graciously intervened in human history. And specifically, He intervened in Paul's life. In other words, remember your position in Christ and how you got there. Remember the position, and then also take a look at your current state. The grace of God was shown to humanity by sending Christ Jesus to Earth to come to die for the sins of the world. And you have been laid hold of by that if you are in Him. But you haven't fully come to know that in your flesh yet.

The grace of God is also shown by His sovereign election of salvation for some. Ephesians chapter 1:4 says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him." And it continues in verse 5, "In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the kind intention of His will." So, there's just grace upon grace, God doing the apprehension of those whom He chooses. And this is important for us who are wrestling with our current imperfect state. We're currently imperfect, but positionally, we're in Christ.

I'm telling you this morning that it's important to look at where you stand right now, positionally, versus where you are in your state in this life, in the process of sanctification. It's important for sanctification to look at that.

Has anybody heard of the "Gospel Primer for Christians"? Anybody heard of that? Gospel Primer, Milton Vincent. If you haven't heard of Milton Vincent and the "Gospel Primer for Christians", get your hands on it. This is a sweet little booklet. It's about preaching the Gospel to

yourself each and every day. And Milton Vincent writes 30 or 31 reasons why you should preach the Gospel to yourself every day. And strangely enough, there are 30 or 31 days in the month. So, his intent is that you would read one of those reasons every day for preaching the Gospel to yourself and rehearse these things in your head. So, essentially your position in Christ right now is the Gospel and you are to tell yourself what is already true about yourself in Christ, so that you may take steps in sanctification. This is so important. But I want to read something to you from Milton Vincent. This is reason number nine for rehearsing the Gospel to yourself every day. It says "Resting in Christ's righteousness" - that's the title. And here's what he says. He says, "The Gospel encourages me to rest in my righteous standing with God. A standing which Christ Himself has accomplished and always maintains for me. I never have to do a moment's labor to gain or maintain my justified status before God." And here's what I think is really cool about this whole statement that he has here. He says, "Freed from the burden of such task of gaining or maintaining righteousness, I now can put my energies into enjoying God, pursuing holiness and ministering God's amazing grace to others."

I think that's so cool, so understanding your position affects your current state in your goal of becoming more Christ-like, in that you (I keep tripping on this event here, this is crazy in that you) see that you no longer have to work. You no longer have to strive to gain something that's unattainable. You're saying, "That's already secure. That's already true. I'm in Christ. That cannot be taken away from me. This is mine. Look at all these blessings." You go into Ephesians, you say, "In Christ, in Christ, in Christ. All of those things in Christ are true about me right now. Sweet. Thank you Lord. Now, I can get on with my life and start putting my energies into serving You. Not because I want You to show me favour and give me grace and save me - You already have. I don't need to work towards that. I just need to work toward being Christ-like as worship to You. I want to spend myself as an offering to minister to others around me." That is sweet. It's amazing.

Existing in the position of grace, here is what motivates Paul. It propels him to pursue Christ-likeness. He hasn't arrived yet, but he presses on and grace fuels him to do that. Understanding your position fuels you to do that. It should free us from legalistic performance and drive us to be Christ-like. Grace should not on the other hand cause us to throw our hands in the air and say, "Who cares about how I live?"

So, let's put it in a pithy statement. If you are in the position of being a Christian, you are in the state of becoming Christ-like, okay? I want you to think about that. If I am positionally being a Christian, you are in the state of becoming Christ-like. So, if you say, "I'm a Christian," you must also be willing to say, "I'm becoming like my Saviour." And you can't have one without the other. You can't become like Christ without being redeemed. And you can't be redeemed without also becoming like Christ in some measure. The two, they come as a package.

At one time, I was counselling a young man who had been struggling in the area of sexual sin, and he was just experiencing some massive defeats there. And essentially, what he said to me was this, "Positionally, I'm in Christ. So, I don't have to worry about fixing this stuff. I'm just going to go on doing what I do and it all get better in glory." No, that's not what the Bible's saying. Grace isn't license. It's freedom. It's freedom from this stuff, to move forward and to become more Christ-like. He'd given up in despair, but this passage fights against that kind of

discouragement. It also fights against Christian perfectionism. So, a right understanding of our state of grace or our position in Christ keeps us from the extremes of licentiousness and elitism and motivates us to freely pursue genuine Christ-likeness.

In this, it's also important to have - you got to on one side, have security and joy in your current position, but then, there's a neediness and a discontent with your current state. And the two are working in tandem to propel you to Christ's-likeness. And so, the first key in your quest this year toward Christ-likeness, is to know your state. And especially, know your state versus your position.

Now, the second key is to focus on the goal. Focus on the goal. Look at verses 13 and 14.

“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” In verse 13, Paul gently and humbly affirms what he said in the verse before, “Brethren, I'm not there yet. I'm not yet perfected in Christ.” But he's saying, “This doesn't slow me down.”

And in a pattern that's so familiar to Paul, he provides an athletic metaphor to help his readers understand the degree to which he strives for sanctification. The words that he chooses give us a picture of somebody who's running a race. Perhaps we could picture the Olympics. Perhaps you guys have seen the Olympians run the races. Maybe you watched the Summer Olympics, the Rio Olympics a while back. I think we're going to be coming up on new Olympics here pretty soon for the summer. Actually, Canada hardly watches the Summer Olympics, do they? It's mostly the Winter Olympics. So anyways, whatever. Maybe it's a skating race or something like that. But have you seen the guys doing the speed racing in environment suits? Seen those guys? No? How about the guys in the astronaut suits or the guys that have luggage on their backs? No, it doesn't happen. That's ridiculous. If they want to win the race, they push all that stuff aside, and they strip down to what's the bare essential. Sometimes it's like maybe too much, but they're going to get it done. They're going to win that race. I mean, it's better than what the Greeks did. The Greeks, those guys, they would strip down and they would run those Olympic races. Thankfully, they don't do that anymore. But the point is this, they push aside everything because they're focused on the goal. The one thing, that's winning that race, that's getting that prize at the end. They see it, they want it. Everything else is secondary, and they push forward. They take action in achieving. Their face is set on the finish line, and they go. They're focused on the goal.

Paul says he forgets what's behind him. That all of his assets in the flesh, they've now become liabilities, everything that was before Christ. But more than that, he says in verse 8, more than that, he's counted all things lost. So, I think that could even include things that he maybe has done in Christ. He's not considering those things. He's not banking on those things. He's not resting, sitting back on his laurels and saying, “You know what, these things over here - I've done a lot. I'm just going to chill out.” No, he's not doing that. He's pressing forward. His eyes are on the goal and he's going forward.

It can be a temptation at times for us to do the same thing, to coast on past achievements. Not that we're striving to achieve status in the church or in the Christian faith, but we do want to grow and not only in our Christ-likeness but ministry to one another. And sometimes, we can be

tempted to just say, “You know what, that's enough. I've done enough,” and let off the gas, take our eyes off the goal and begin to focus on other things.

There's an urban legend in the Lower Mainland about a rather large car dealership network that has the policy that they fire the lowest earning salesman every month. You probably have a name in your mind of what car dealership that might be. But I will not say it. It doesn't matter if you'd been the top salesman for 10 months or 10 years or whatever. You have one month at the bottom, and you're gone. And I don't know ... it breaks down if I'm trying to bring that into the Christian circle because we cannot lose our salvation. I'm not saying any of that. But I'm just trying to illustrate the fact that we don't want to get our eyes off the goal. And a car salesman's goal is to sell cars, and to keep moving forward with that goal in mind. In the Christian life, the goal is Christ-likeness, to receive the prize of the resurrection. Yes, it's coming. It is ultimately coming. But we're not just going to say, “Forget about it until it happens.” We're going to strive to become ever more like our Lord up until that point. We're always reaching forward, we're not coasting. And Paul has no intention of coasting on past activities.

In verse 13, he says that he was reaching forward. That word behind “reaching” is used for the muscles that are straining and laboring for this athlete. He's making an effort to achieve the desired goal. And also there's an interesting use of this word, behind our English word, we see there “press”, “I press on,” in verse 14. It's the same verb that he uses in verse 6 to refer to himself as a persecutor of the church. So, Paul says, “I'm pressing on,” but he was once a pressor of the church - an oppressor, but a pressor. So, now, with the same zeal that he was formerly oppressing and pressing the church, he presses on to Christ. He presses on in Christ's likeness. He presses on to achieve the prize.

So, Paul calls us to strip aside all encumbrances, the things that tangle us up. Everything must be subordinated to the Lordship of Christ. Even good things. That is, your finances can't take priority over your goal of Christ-likeness. Your career can't take priority over your goal of Christ-likeness. Even your family can't take priority over that goal. And these are all good things, but in their proper subordination to the goal, right? We can be Christ-like in all of these things, but always your mind is on, “How can I be more Christ-like in stewarding my finances or shepherding my family or being a good employee at work? Being a good husband? How would Christ do this?” Always thinking about that. “How would Christ have me serve my husband?” - the wife might say. All of these things, they all must be put in their proper place and be done to the glory of God.

Paul reminds us that though we pursue the goal of sanctification throughout our whole lives, he says in verse 14, the finish line is the threshold of Heaven, the upward call of Christ. We strive all lifelong in this life to receive the prize in the next. It's not something that we're going to get now, but it's something that has a hopeful anticipation of the end of this life. Paul says in Second Timothy 4:7-8, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” And so, he was attaining to that goal, and in the end of his life, he said, “I've done it, I've gone all the way. I've kept my focus. I have been becoming more Christ-like with the eye to the fact that I'm going to finally hold onto Christ. I will have my prize, and I have been becoming more like Him along the way.” My

prayer for us this year is that we would do the same in striving ahead, staying focused on the goal.

So, we've seen that the first key to pursuing Christ-likeness is to know your state versus your position. And the second is to focus on the goal. And now, the third and the last point, is to think God's thoughts. Think God's thoughts. Verses 15 and 16, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by the same standard to which we have attained."

Paul does something kind of strange here. He says, "If you're perfect, you should have this attitude." But he just said in verse 12 that he hasn't become perfect. So, what does he mean? We know that Scripture doesn't contradict Scripture, so Paul is not going back on something he just said five seconds ago. What he's doing, is emphasizing the believer's position and not their present condition. If you are a child of God, you are completely and perfectly a child of God. You're considered perfectly righteous in Christ, you're considered a new creation - Second Corinthians 5:17. And so, when he says "as many as are perfect", he's speaking to all Christians. Everyone who is in Christ. And he wants them all to think like Christians. So, what he's telling us here, he wants us to think like Christians.

Now, for this third point I said, "Think God's thoughts," but you didn't see that word there in the text. And that's because the word behind "attitude" means "to think on". Not just an attitude, but it's a thinking. And so, what does it mean to think like Christians? It means to have a mind dwelling on Christ-likeness. It means to be using the mind of Christ. And we have it already. We've got it already. First Corinthians 2:16 says, that we have the mind of Christ. We have it in His word, and we have it through His Spirit. And like a good parent or a good shepherd, Paul says in the second half of Philippians 3:15 - that he will try to correct any errant thinking.

Have you ever heard of the statement, "You are, what you eat?" Well, I learned this to be true for animals as well. Any hunters here? Anybody like to hunt? No, not really. Okay. Oh, I might be in bad company? I got to be careful, I'm close to the Lower Mainland. And I know one guy who used a hunting illustration for people in the Lower Mainland and he just about got booted off the stage. So, I'm going to tread lightly here.

But I used to hunt. I hunted up in Grand Prairie when we lived up there. And I learned that animals taste like what they eat. I used to watch a moose in my backyard back onto the swamp. And there'd be this moose in there and it would paw away at the swamp and dig and eat. I knew what that swamp smelled like and it just must've been a horrible mouthful to be eating all that garbage. But then, one day, I drew a moose tag and I shot it. "Oh, I see what you've been eating. Now, I'm going to shoot you and I'm going to eat you." Man, I should've known better. That was the worst piece of meat I've ever had. It was just an awful moose. I don't know if it was just directly tied to what it was eating. I think it was, because that swamp smelled really awful. But we ended up having to give that meat to the dogs, pretty much all of it. But elk that I used to shoot, they were really good. They were awesome. And that's because they would come down, these elk would come down out of the saddle hills and they would come onto the farmer's fields and they'd be eating canola, they'd be eating oats, they'd be eating Alfalfa, they'd be eating all this good stuff. And so, you take the animal and it was just wonderful. It was glorious. It tasted

like what it ate. I guess not Alfalfa. But anyways, it was really good because it was eating really good stuff.

But to draw an analogy, we are flavoured or scented by what dominates our lives. We're flavoured or scented by what dominates our lives. If we're dominated by the world, if this is the attitude, then this is the scent and the flavour that we begin to take on. If the world's thoughts have influenced our thinking, then, the word of God, as we rub up against it, as we get it in our lives, it begins to flush out that scent, that flavour. It corrects us. If our sinful corruption influences our thinking, the word of God will correct us. And God has given us resources to think His thoughts. So, what I'm telling you, I'm telling you from the text, and I'm encouraging you to appropriate these means of grace for sanctification this year as you pursue Christ-likeness. Think God's own thoughts. Use His resources to think His thoughts and be flavoured by Him. Verse 16 says that on the contrary to unbiblical thinking, Biblical thinking leads to Biblical action. Biblical thinking, when you think right, Biblically, you're going to follow in that. If you think poorly, if you think unbiblically, you're going to follow that. You are what you eat.

Pastor MacArthur writes in one of his commentaries, he says, there are four divinely provided resources that help believers to consistently pursue the prize of Christ-likeness. He says, first, is the word of God. Second is prayer, communion with God, submitting yourself to God in prayer. The third, is following the godly example of others, those who are also in the word and being sanctified. And finally, fourth, God uses trials to mold believers into the image of Christ. That's the time when we get to exercise what we've learned through the mind of Christ, through right thinking, exercise that Christ-likeness in our trials, in our challenges.

God is so gracious not to leave us in our broken state. He wants everyone to attain to their calling and He promises to do that. He promises to accomplish that. He who began a good work in us will perfect us until the day of Christ Jesus. And he gives us resources to think His thoughts after Him. We as believers are in a kingdom that has been apprehended by Christ. It was formerly the slave master, sin, who had it. It was under his domain. Christ has overtaken it. He's overtaken your life. And now, sin is an illegal alien in this kingdom. And maybe in poor taste, I say this, but we need ICE. We need immigration and customs enforcement to come and remove the illegal aliens of sin from our lives. And God has given us resources to do that in His word, through the preaching of His word, through fellow believers, through prayer. And I encourage you to avail yourselves of that this year in your goal of Christ-likeness.

This New Year, in conclusion, it's upon us. Many people are turning over a new leaf. You might change your diet. It's healthy to do that. Mark Zuckerberg is pursuing religion because it's very important. But as Christians, Christ-likeness is our goal. Everything that we do, that's our goal.

And this is why Paul's mantra is "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom so that we may present every man complete in Christ," says Colossians 1:28. He desires to see everyone presented complete in Christ. This year, may your New Year's goal be to be completed in Christ. No, not in this life, but pursuing the goal all throughout this life until you attain it. You were saved to be made complete in Christ. You were raised from spiritual death to be conformed into the image of God's Son, so that you may walk among the

spiritually dead in the world as a lighthouse, as a beacon, as a testimony of the gracious power of an eternal God.

Christians, as we set our sights on the year ahead, though, the year might be new, the goal is not. It's always the same goal. This just came to my mind. I got to be careful when something just pops into my head and I start speaking. Anybody ever watch - what was it? Pinky and the Brain? Yeah? "What are we doing tonight, Brain?" "The same thing we do every night, right? Take over the world," he says. Well, for us, it's we're doing the same thing as we do every year - Pursue Christ-likeness. So, as you go into 2019, make that your goal in all things to be more like your Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He's given us tools to do that. Let's avail ourselves of them. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for Your word. Thank you for what Paul penned there. Thank you that You were so gracious to apprehend us when we were enemies. We were far off and You came in and dismissed slave master, sin, from our lives, and You have made us children of Yours.

And so, I pray that as we are in a kingdom dominated by You, this year, we would be flavoured more like You. We would have more of Your scent on us. That the world would see that. That we would see that and be encouraged. We would pursue this goal of Christ-likeness all the way to the upward call of holding onto Christ, seeing Him with our eyes one day when we see Him face to face. That will be an exciting thing.

Lord, propel us, make us more like Your Son this year. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.