

The Watford Word



www.watfordchurchofchrist.org

What's on

Saturday 28th March: *Jesus' vision for unity.*

Panellists: Andy Boakye, Andy Ezeilo, Roger Packham, Peter Devin, Chris Birtles, and Malcolm Cox. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/that-all-may-be-one-tickets-1985098526129?aff=oddtcreator>



Sunday 29 March: *Church service. Visiting speaker - Peter Devin from Dublin.*

Sunday 05 April: *Easter Sunday service.*

Events further ahead

Friday 22nd to Sunday 24th May: *UK & Ireland mature singles retreat – “Trust In The Lord”*

Friday 24th to 27th July: *ICCM Preteen Camp*

Saturday 25th to 31st July: *ICCM Teen Camp*

Friday 11th - 13 September: *UK & Ireland Young Professionals Retreat in Chesham.*



Sept 30th - Oct 04th: *Spirituality Retreat.* <https://shop.thewayministry.global/2026-csr/home>

Friday 30th October to Sunday 01st November: *Autumn Student Retreat for the UK & Ireland.*

Thursday 12-15th November: *UK, Ireland and Nordics leadership retreat.*

Context in Philippians 3:12-4:1

Paul is responding to pressures within the church. His teaching is shaped by what the Philippians were hearing and, perhaps, beginning to believe.

Fullness

In the previous section, Paul has just rejected every source of confidence outside Christ. His

status, background, and religious achievements now count as loss compared to knowing Christ.

Some false teachers likely suggested that fullness in Christ needed more, particularly observance of the Jewish law. Others may have leaned the other way, treating grace as a license for sin. Both positions distort the gospel. One adds to Christ; the other empties the Christian life of direction.

So Paul is careful: “Not that I have already obtained all this... or have already been made perfect.” The word he uses (teleioō) refers to completeness or reaching the intended goal. Paul’s point is that has not yet reached the full knowledge of Christ in all its depth.

That matters because it undercuts any claim that perfection is already achieved. If Paul has not “arrived,” then neither have they (or we). This is why he speaks of “pressing on” suggesting effort. What is the motivation? “because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Paul is not striving to secure his place, but responding to the fact that Christ has already taken hold of him.

This also explains the tension in his thinking. The Christian life is lived between what is already true and what is not yet complete. We belong to Christ, but we are still growing into that reality.

Forward

In verse 13, Paul emphasises that he still does not consider himself to have taken hold of it fully. So he adopts two attitudes: “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.”

“Forgetting” means refusing to be defined by the past, whether failure or success. For Paul, that includes both his guilt as a persecutor and his achievements as a Pharisee. Either could hold

him back. “Straining” conveys effort and focus. Growth is intentional.

Paul uses the language of “goal” and “prize.” Drawing on athletic imagery, he describes a life directed toward the “upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This is not just about reaching heaven, but about growing fully into the life to which God calls us in Christ.

Maturity

In verses 15–16, Paul addresses the “mature,” using the same root word he has just denied of himself. Most likely, he is redefining maturity. True maturity is not claiming perfection, but recognising the need to keep pressing on. At the same time, he shows restraint. Where there is misunderstanding, he trusts that God will bring clarity in time. He also emphasises continuity: live up to what you have already attained. No going backwards.

Example

In verse 17, Paul turns to the importance of example. “Join together in following my example.” The Philippians learned the Christian life not only through teaching, but through observing others. The emphasis is communal. They are to watch closely those who are actively living in line with the gospel.

That leads to the contrast in verses 18–19. Paul warns of those who live as “enemies of the cross of Christ.” The exact group is debated, but the issue is clear. Their focus is on earthly things. They undermine the meaning of the cross.

Paul’s tone here is unusually emotional. He writes with tears. This is not a minor issue. To lose sight of the cross is to lose the centre of the gospel.

Citizenship

In contrast, Paul reminds the Philippians: “our citizenship is in heaven.” This would have been a powerful image. As residents of a Roman colony,

they understood what it meant to belong to a distant centre while living in a different place.

Paul applies that idea to the Christian life. Believers are a kind of colony of heaven. Their identity, values, and direction are shaped by where they *truly* belong.

Hope

This is paired with expectation. They eagerly await the return of Jesus, who will complete what he has begun. The transformation Paul describes includes the whole person. Even the body, currently marked by weakness, will be renewed in glory. This future hope is grounded in Christ’s power to bring all things under his rule.

Firm

Finally, in 4:1, Paul draws everything together: “Therefore... stand firm in this way.” The “therefore” points back to the whole argument. In light of ongoing growth, faithful examples, real dangers, and a secure future, the appropriate response is steadfastness.

This passage, then, gives us more than encouragement. It gives us a framework. One that resists both legalism and complacency. One that calls for steady growth without claiming arrival. And one that keeps Christ, from beginning to end, at the centre.

Your brother, Malcolm

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