

# Co-Imitators of Christ

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I'm going to read from Philippians 3, chapter 12, verse 12. Paul writes, Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you, even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and their glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

[ 1 : 3 5 ] Well, first I should start with a confession that this is not a Father's Day talk. I didn't quite forget Father's Day, but I did forget Father's Day when I was preparing this sermon. Except for the fact, you'll see I want to start by talking about careers.

I've got an outline in front of you, that's sort of the title of the introduction. I want to talk about careers, and I should say, you know, one of the things I do respect about my father is that he always faithfully provided for us, he worked hard every day.

I've never been insecure or unsafe or anything, because my dad was a very responsible, godly, faithful man. Anyway, I want to pick up on this word careers and have a think about it.

And I know that for some of you, you'll be in the middle of a long career, some of you have finished that stage in your lives. But I hope you'll bear with me, because I think it'll be helpful still to think Christianly about our careers, whatever stage you might be up to.

So first, what exactly is a career? Well, originally, it's a word we borrowed from the French. It's about making progress and advancing. The Cambridge English Dictionary definition, so they sound like trustworthy boffins, they say that a career is the job or series of jobs that you do during your working life, especially if you continue to get better jobs and earn more money.

[ 3 : 0 2 ] And I do think that that especially is pretty important for us to think about this morning. So people talk about your career prospects, don't they? Or your career ladder, like you're supposed to be moving up into bigger and better things.

A career, in this sense, is not just a job. It's a journey through a series of jobs that are supposedly better, although the definition of better is probably the key thing that we should think about as Christians.

And of course, hopefully, in these worldly careers, or in the way they view careers, it's about hopefully earning you more and more money. So how should Christians think about careers then?

Well, I mean, of course, number one, let's just be clear, there's nothing wrong with earning lots of money. In fact, it's good for Christians to work, to provide for their families, and share their money as generously as they can, and so on.

And Paul rebukes people who won't work hard and don't earn a living so that they can provide and share and so on. Of course, to add to that, there's nothing necessarily wrong with changing jobs and moving from being a team member to being a team manager, or whatever it might be, becoming a partner, gaining seniority.

[ 4 : 17 ] And again, in fact, actually, I would think it would be quite a good thing for lots of Christians to be known as hard workers, honest, good with people. I think we would expect Christians to be valued leaders in the workplace.

But, here's the big difference between Christians and non-Christians in terms of how we must view our careers, I think. The difference is about service versus status.

Service versus status. So, for the Christian person, any job that we do is about service. It's about, can I do good for others here?

Can I provide something valuable for my clients, customers, my patients, whatever it might be? And it's not about status. It's not about me and gaining confidence in the flesh.

You remember that from last week. It's not about competing and outdoing my neighbours. And if you remember last week, you remember that's what Paul's old life used to be about.

[ 5 : 27 ] It used to be about racial pedigree, religious performance, and a relentless passion for God that made him better than other people. In fact, listen to how he puts it in Galatians chapter 1.

It's Galatians chapter 1, verse 14. He says, And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my own people. So extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

Now, in modern speak, what Paul is talking about there is his Jewish career, his religious career. And mind you, this can definitely happen in religious occupations as well, this obsession with status rather than service.

But you see, Paul was the youngest rabbi ever to be promoted to such and such a position. He was breaking glass ceilings, as it were.

He was impressing his superiors. But then everything changed when he met Jesus. And you remember, in fact, that when he met the Lord Jesus, his career took a sharp turn downwards.

[ 6 : 34 ] And upon meeting the Lord Jesus, he was demoted, as it were, or fired. Paul came to realize that everything he'd been working towards, everything he had strived to achieve and attain, in the end it was all rubbish.

So he gave it all up. Paul decided it was worth losing everything in order to gain Christ. And actually, I didn't highlight this last week, but if you just think back or glance up to last week's passage, and then actually glance even further back into chapter 2 and the Christ hymn, you might have noticed how Paul's life, after meeting Jesus, took on a very Christ-like, Jesus-like shape.

And Paul deliberately flags this with various repeated words. Right? So just as Christ did not grasp at his superior position in glory, but gave it all up, Paul did not cling to his privileges, the privileges of his former life, but counted it all loss for the sake of knowing Christ.

And just as the Lord Jesus took the form of a servant and became obedient to death, so Paul's desire was to share in Christ's sufferings and be conformed to him in his death. And then just as Christ was raised from the dead and exalted and glorified, Paul too spent his life waiting for the day when he would be raised from the dead and share in Christ's glory.

The point is, you see, that the life of faith is the life of following Jesus. The Christian career, the journey that we're all on, as it were, no matter what job you might be doing, kind of on the side, the Christian career is first one of descending down, down, down.

[ 8 : 24 ] That's the direction of travel. That's the movement. Not advancement, but devancement. I don't know what the word is. Devancement. In sacrificial service and suffering.

And waiting in faith and hope for the day of resurrection glory. It's a J curve, if you like. All right, so now we pick up the argument in verse 12 this week with Paul still talking about that glorious day of resurrection.

There are two halves to the passage this morning, which is pretty easy. First in verses 12 to 16, Paul keeps talking about himself, about his own aim in life, his trajectory, his career, if you like.

And then in verses 17 to 21, he turns to speak to the Philippians to call upon them to imitate him. So, first in verse 12. Not that I have already obtained this, i.e. the resurrection, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[ 9 : 37 ] So, the image is one of a running race. Paul is straining forwards towards his goal to reach the prize ahead of him. This time, he describes his prize as perfection, right?

Or complete maturity. So, at the resurrection, when he rises from the dead, he will finally be finished, as it were. The complete package.

The righteous, noble, glorious, strong man. No longer subject to the frailties and weaknesses of human life now. I'm not always plagued by sin and sickness.

Now, what we are looking forward to, brothers and sisters, is perfection in, I guess, every dimension. You know, you can imagine. Physical, moral, emotional, mental perfection.

I can't help but think of Paul's vivid description in Romans chapter 7. If you remember, he talks about life in these fleshly bodies, the fight that sort of goes back and forth inside of us and is exhausting.

[ 10 : 39 ] I want to do what's right, but for some reason, because of the sin that dwells within me, I keep doing what I don't want to do and I don't have the strength to do the good things that I do want to do.

And then as he reaches the point of exhaustion, you can almost hear him collapsing, then there's just this moment of great relief when he says, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. And I don't know about you, but I often feel this way, wretched man than I am. You get to the point, so miserable, depressed and discouraged.

I most certainly feel like this from time to time. Wretched man than I am, I'm frustrated, living in this weak and sin-riddled body, struggling to be anything other than pathetic and disappointing.

Well, if that's you, friends, don't give up. What Paul is talking about in Romans chapter 7 and then here in Philippians is the sure and certain hope of rescue and restoration.

[ 11 : 45 ] We will one day be delivered from these bodies of death through Jesus Christ and we will be perfect, filled with his spirit from head to toe, inside and out.

You will be the completed and perfected you. In Romans chapter 8, Paul talks about how we have the first fruits of the spirit now, but not the full harvest, as it were.

We have the spirit inside us, renovating our inner person, but we're still awaiting the redemption of our bodies. We're awaiting the spirit to flow through every nook and cranny of us and renovate us completely.

But we don't have this yet. We're not yet perfect. Notice here, not even Paul himself claimed to have already reached perfection. And this is very important and I don't want to labor over it too long, but as you can imagine, it has massive implications for our expectations of the Christian life.

So I just want to do a little bit of church history with you for a moment so that we can be alert to the people who tend to deny or downplay this teaching today. So does that make sense?

[ 12 : 53 ] This is just a little bit of an aside, but I want to think about this topic for a moment. It all starts with John Wesley and I'm not sure if we have a picture of him, do we, Simon? Are you with me, brother?

Oh, we do. Look at that happy guy. 1703 to 1791. John Wesley was a great leader of the Evangelical Awakening in England. He was an Anglican clergyman, but he started something called Methodism, which eventually in Australia sort of turned into the Uniting Church.

Now he taught something called Christian perfection or entire sanctification, where he argued that in this life, Christians could achieve a state where the love of God reigned so supremely in their hearts that it would give them a thorough and complete inward and outward holiness.

Now, Wesley believed that this higher state of spirituality could only be attained by faith and through a miraculous, instantaneous, second blessing experience of the Holy Spirit, distinct from conversion.

I don't know if you can see where this is going, but this was effectively then what gave rise to the Pentecostal or charismatic movement. When Wesley's teaching spread to America, it began something called the American Holiness Movement.

[ 14 : 19 ] And again, American Holiness preachers emphasize two crises. They meant something positive by this, but anyway, two crises in the process of salvation. The first crisis happens when people get converted.

They receive the Holy Spirit and are regenerated, they're justified, and so on. But then, for some believers, there was the possibility of a second crisis called the baptism of the Holy Spirit when believers would get to enjoy full salvation or entire sanctification.

And these preachers would talk about how people can be freed from the floor in the moral nature that caused sin. I'll repeat that. They said, freed we could be now, freed from the floor in the moral nature that caused sin.

Now, initially, the baptism of the Holy Spirit then seems to have had nothing to do with speaking in tongues, by the way. It was just being described as a kind of overpowering emotional experience of God's love that would lead to perfect holiness.

Tongues was introduced later, which again, initially was about speaking in foreign languages, but then became about speaking in ecstatic babble. And similarly, the emphasis on holiness began to shift towards an emphasis on empowerment generally, an instant empowerment, both for conquering sin but also for working miracles, performing healings, etc.

[ 15 : 46 ] A bloke by the name of Charles Finney became one of the key leaders in the movement. They weren't actually looking at each other. Anyway, he emphasized that a higher and more stable form of the Christian life was attainable and was the privilege of all Christians if only we would take hold of it.

Okay, now, I don't want to press on further with this story, I guess, but I just want you to see the importance of this doctrine and how it can go astray. What should you expect in the Christian life?

The truth is, actually, that you should expect to be always failing, always frustrated, always struggling and battling and striving.

I'm not saying there won't be moments of great victory, right? There might even be seasons of peace and joy and calm, perhaps, but even in those seasons, be vigilant. The devil is prowling around like a roaring lion and always within our bodies, we have a traitor in our midst.

We will never be rid of this moral flaw until the final day. Our sin, our own evil desires and lusts, we are not yet perfect and we never will be until the resurrection, until the redemption of our bodies.

[ 17 : 03 ] There is no higher life now. No kind of next level Christians. There's no secret power or spiritual key. The missionaries don't get it.

The pastors certainly don't get it. There's just the daily battle of trusting Jesus. Jesus. Two steps forward, one step back, confess, repent, try again to look to him and keep plodding on.

We do have the spirit working within us and again, there may be times when the spirit fills us for a particular task or ministry. I think we certainly see that in the New Testament.

We see brothers emboldened to do God's work and wouldn't that be wonderful? We could pray for that. But the idea that we will ever reach a sort of second stage in this life where we're just sort of floating on spiritual sunshine as it were, cruising through, is just completely wrong.

And actually, as it turns out, it tends to be very damaging and dangerous. Every day, there are going to be things you do that are not fully pleasing to the Lord and things you don't do that you really ought to have done.

[ 18 : 12 ] And that's just the Christian life this side of glory. So in Philippians 3, the apostle is emphatic, isn't he? I have not reached perfection.

I am not claiming to already be perfect. I'm still striving, straining, pressing on in faith towards that glorious goal. Now the second thing I want to mention about this paragraph though is the constant interplay between God's sovereignty and Paul's effort.

So you see in the first line, Paul says, not that I have already obtained this or again, I press on to make it my own or in verse 13, brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal.

Right? You see, it's all about Paul's effort, Paul's hard work to obtain the resurrection that he's hoping for. What Paul is doing is he's striving, he's straining like a good athlete towards perfection, towards maturity.

This is what the Christian life is like. If you want to be perfect, you've got to press on. You've got to put your back into it. You've got to put your shoulder to the wheel. It's hard work killing off sin and learning new habits.

[ 19 : 26 ] But then, interspersed throughout these statements about Paul's efforts, are all of these reminders that really, it's God who is sovereign and looking after Paul and actually empowering Paul from within, working inside Paul.

So, starting off in verse 12 again. And actually, let me just give you another translation of verse 12 because I think the NET captures this verse more clearly. Paul says, not that I have already attained this, that is, I have not already been perfected.

And you see how he moves from the active voice to the passive voice? Right? In the first clause, he's active and he's the one doing the attaining. But then in the second clause, he's passive, he's the one being perfected.

Or again, and we'll just keep reading in the ESV now, he says, I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Don't you see?

Christ did his work initially to purchase me, to make me his own. So now, I'm wanting to make Christ or Christ-like perfection my own. Or again, finally in verse 14, notice Paul says, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[ 20 : 42 ] That is the prize that God is calling me to. He's kind of beckoning me and drawing me towards himself. Paul is, for his part, heeding this call.

But God is, by his powerful word, working in Paul. And again, we've seen this dynamic before in the letter, if you remember. I think it was when Josh was preaching on chapter 2, verse 12.

Paul says there, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. The word work out means to acquire something by means of labor and hard work. So, acquire your own salvation by hard work with fear and trembling.

Verse 13, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Again, throughout this letter, these two things are not being pitted against one another, but in scripture they're going hand in hand.

The reason you should get to work with courage and encouragement is because God is at work in you. The work will surely succeed because God is at work in you.

[ 21 : 50 ] You're not on your own. The reason you should strive and strain for the prize is because Christ has made you his own and God is calling you upwards towards the prize, as it were. His calling word is at work in you, bringing you to himself.

Alright, let's move on to the second paragraph, verse 17. So far, Paul has been talking about himself. Now, he's going to move to address the Philippians and what they should do. And literally, verse 17 begins with something like this.

Brothers, become my co-imitators. Brothers, become my co-imitators. which actually, when you think about it, is slightly more ambiguous than the ESV suggests.

So the question, I guess, is does Paul mean join in imitating me, which is how the ESV translators have done it, or does he mean join me in imitating, presumably Christ?

Christ. And I think, personally, that he actually probably means the latter. Because remember, he's just been describing the Christian life in these ways. His own life has been about imitating Christ, descending down, down, down, suffering in humble service and sacrificial work, and then awaiting glory.

[ 23 : 11 ] So now, I take it, he's calling the Philippians to join him in imitating Christ. And he says, and, keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

So at this point, he certainly adds in himself and some others. Notice there are now four characters in the scene, if you like. There's Paul and Timothy, and I'll count them as one. They're the us.

Then there's the Philippians, right, that's two. Then as I say, there's Christ, I think, which unfortunately the translators have left out. But then also, there's these other people who walk according to the example you have in us, Paul says.

So, if you're following along the outline, that's why we're up to point number two, so point number one, and I've called it the imitation chain. There's an imitation chain growing here.

That as we seek to imitate Christ, you see, Paul would have the Philippians first imitate those around them who were following the example of Paul and Timothy who are in turn imitating Christ.

[ 24 : 23 ] And again, I think this is very practically helpful for us because a big part of the Christian life is copying. It's plagiarism. Just as actions and events need words to explain them, often words need actions to explain them.

Don't they? You know, sometimes it's hard to know what someone really means until they show you or demonstrate until you see it sort of at work in their life. So, the Bible encourages us to imitate other, older, wiser Christians, not just to listen to what they say, but also to do what they do.

In Hebrews chapter 13, the preacher says, remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Or again, in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul says, I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

The imitation is an absolutely crucial part of learning and growing as a Christian. And this has massive implications for things like MTS, growth groups, kids church, everything.

[ 25 : 41 ] Our goal as leaders and as followers, and to some extent I guess that we're all sort of leaders and followers in different capacities. Our goal as leaders is not only to teach the truth, but also to set a good example.

And our goal as followers is not only to listen to what our teachers say, but also to pick up their habits, the habits of their lifestyle. Paul is encouraging us not just to compare our lives to his teaching or the teachings of Christ, but to compare our lives to his lifestyle and to the life of the Lord Jesus.

Of course, the servant who gave his life for us. Now, while Paul is talking about imitation on the one hand, imitating good leaders, he also talks on the other hand about dangerous enemies.

And I think, although not everyone agrees with me on this, but I think he's going back to talk about the Judaizers in verse 18. At least, I think they're his chief target.

He says, for many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, their glory and their shame with minds set on earthly things.

[ 27 : 02 ] Now, notice, first of all, he tells us about his tears. In other words, he is trying to, what is it, soften the strong language he's about to use or just help us see where it's coming from.

He's about to use pretty brutal language and it's hardly PC, but it's not a kind of callous rejection of these people. No, he loves them. And again, if he is talking first and foremost about the Judaizers, then it's certainly reminiscent of what he says elsewhere, you know, in Romans chapter 9, he says, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen, according to the flesh.

Paul, of course, has just told us that he was once a zealous religious fanatic, just like many of his kinsmen. He's not trying to talk with pride or snobbery here. He's not looking down on these people, but simply lamenting the truth of their desperate state.

And Paul describes them in five different ways. And actually, you know, this is true for all people who have not yet submitted to the Lord Jesus. Number one, they walk as enemies of the cross, which is to say that the cross is the great divider of humanity.

And the cross is what splits humanity down the middle. It's sort of a funny expression, isn't it, when you think about it, that the cross has friends and enemies? Chiefly, because the cross represents an entirely new way of viewing the world and relating to God and to each other.

[ 28 : 44 ] So some people want to cling to the old way. For the Judaizers, like Paul, before he was confronted with the Lord Jesus, for the Judaizers, their religion, based on racial pedigree, moral performance, meriting God's approval through fanatic zeal, that was a great source of pride and comfort to them.

They could look down on everyone else. They were the superior breed. But the cross, of course, says a big no to all of that.

And in fact, rubs in very poignantly their own guilt and rejection of God because they crucified his Messiah. And then the cross represents a religion based on God's grace, God's unmerited kindness and generosity towards us.

The cross represents a religion about being saved and receiving a righteousness from God that is not our own. Now that is a dangerous threat to the status quo, do you see?

And of course, this still goes on in various guises today. So I mentioned a few weeks ago Amy Carmichael, a great missionary in India around the turn of the 20th century.

[ 29 : 56 ] Listen to what she says about Hinduism and why so many of the people she spoke to in India kept rejecting Christ. And again, I don't know if I've got a photograph do I, Simon? She's talking about this photograph so I don't know if you can see that.

She says, this is a devout worshiper of the god Shiva. She says, as one looks at the photograph, does it not help in the effort to realize the utter hopelessness from every human viewpoint, every human point of view of trying to win such a one?

For example, to even care to think of Christ. There is, over and above the natural apathy common to all, an immense barrier of accumulated merit gained by pilgrimages, austerities, and religious observances.

And the soul is perfectly satisfied and has no desire whatever after God. It is just this self-satisfaction which makes it so hopeless to try to do anything with it. And later on she says, the mothers are as friendly as ever but indifferent.

We hear this is a religion which spoils our caste, they say. And that is the end of it. In the great house of the temple village they listened well for some weeks. Then, as it gradually opened to them that there is no caste whatever in Christianity, their interest died.

[ 31 : 24 ] You see the problem, don't you? The longer that the list of gains you have or the gains you think you've accumulated, the higher up the meritocracy or the aristocracy or your career you are, the more reason you have for arrogance, self-satisfaction, and to cling to your position and the system that got you there.

Faith requires humbling yourself, admitting that all your achievements are rubbish. and letting go of your status only to cast yourself on Christ and the blessings of his cross.

In our own country there is too much for many wealthy and successful people to contemplate losing.

Okay, so firstly, Paul says they walk as enemies of the cross. Secondly, their end is destruction destruction. Let me just point out a couple of things here. And of course, again, these are hard things to talk about, I know that.

Paul is crying as he writes these words so he's not gleeful about people's destruction. But he is serious about it and obviously this is God's word too so God wants us to know about it.

[ 32 : 42 ] The word for destruction occurs 18 times in the New Testament as a noun because 90 other times is a verb. as a noun it's almost always used to describe the eternal punishment of the wicked.



It's something like 16 out of 18 times it's talking about the destruction of the ungodly in eternity. More broadly, it's used to describe killing and murder and spoiling wineskins and ruining ointment and losing sheep and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and so on.

But basically it means that something has been ruined or broken down it's become derelict and no longer of any use. And the second thing to notice is that Paul says destruction is their end.

In other words this will be their ultimate goal their final destination. The word is telos meaning purpose or goal it's actually the same word that Paul used back in verse 12 to talk about reaching perfection.

He was talking about reaching his telos his completion his end. In other words here he's contrasting his telos with their telos. His ultimate end is salvation resurrection life their ultimate end will be destruction and death.

[ 34 : 07 ] Sometimes you might hear people suggest that destruction or judgment would just be a sort of temporary state of affairs for unbelievers like a sort of pit stop or a stepping stone on the way ultimately to eternal life.

Ultimately surely everyone will be saved and I can certainly see the attraction of such a theory but in the end it doesn't square with this passage and the others like it.

Notice Paul says their end is destruction that is their final destination. But thirdly their God is their belly just like back at the beginning of the chapter if you remember where Paul called the Judaizers dogs, evildoers and mutilators or the mutilation here again I think he's using that kind of derogatory language that the Jews would typically use for Gentiles he's turning it back on them and sort of putting them down with their own put downs.

So here Paul is saying that the Judaizers they are the idolaters because they worship their stomachs presumably this is a reference to their obsession with the food laws.

And fourthly they glory in their shame that is in all the things Paul used to glory in all the things that gave him confidence in the flesh they boast about all those things they're glorying in crap.

[ 35 : 33 ] their own filth to use the language from last week. It's not to their credit that they resisted God's Messiah and persecuted his church and insist on trying to establish their own righteousness it's to their shame and yet they boast about it.

And finally they set their minds on earthly things that is they are essentially not godly people but worldly people not heavenly minded but earthly of the flesh they are obsessed with the here and now obsessed with the physical not the spiritual temporary things not eternal.

And this final description of course leads into verse 20 where Paul directly contrasts this with the Christian community. While they have their minds set on earthly things our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a saviour the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

So think back again to the context in Philippi. Remember Philippi was a proud Roman colony an outpost of Rome in the middle of Greece they looked to Caesar for protection for provision.

Rome was in a period of great stability and prosperity what's come to be known as the golden age of the Roman Empire? Well Paul is saying here to the Philippian Christians no we mustn't look to Rome for protection and hope for glory for our laws and so on.

[ 37 : 09 ] No our administrative capital as it were is in heaven and we live as a colony an outpost of heaven here on earth and you see from heaven not from Canberra but from heaven we are awaiting a saviour the Lord Jesus Christ while the unbelievers around us whether Jewish or Gentile religious or not they have their minds set on earthly things thinking about rituals real estate restaurants retail whatever I could keep going we are awaiting a saviour from heaven we are looking to the skies it's like that wonderful scene in Lord of the Rings when they're looking they're at Helm's Deep do you remember?

where they're holding on they're battling in the darkness but they're looking to the dawn or whatever they were looking to the east behold the sun of righteousness is going to rise with healing in his wings just hold on a little longer we are awaiting the day when the skies will tear open and the Lord Jesus will gallop in on his white horse to borrow language from the book of Revelation and what a spectacular sight that will be to see our saviour and king returning in all his glory and you see what Paul is saying here is that's when the real golden age is going to begin you ain't seen nothing yet just wait until you see the kingdom of the Lord Jesus and we'll see how he uses his power to transform our bodies now again just think about how the might of the Roman Empire is crushing Paul's little body at the moment imagine the chains around his legs he's sitting in a Roman prison writing this letter one day he says when the Lord Jesus returns he is going to use his power to transform our lowly bodies

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable in other words we need our bodies to be transformed so that we are fit for life in God's kingdom and Paul says behold I tell you a mystery we shall not all sleep but we shall 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 all be changed for this perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal body must put on immortality when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality then shall come to pass the saying that is written death is swallowed up in victory oh death where is your victory oh death where is your sting the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ you see what's going to happen on that day is that death is going to look a bit stupid death is going to look silly and weak because the power of the Lord Jesus will overwhelm death will swallow up death forever and we will be given bodies fit for a universe subject to Jesus power alright time to draw things to a close then

I think the big takeaway from this passage is summed up in verse 17 that hinge brothers become my co-imitators and as I say I think he means join me in imitating Christ but either way that's definitely the upshot of the passage isn't it the description here is of striving towards perfection straining towards our goal of being like Christ sharing in gospel suffering until we attain to the resurrection of the dead the Christian career then no matter what job you're doing is not one of self-exaltation scrambling up life's greasy pole like everyone else scrapping and scraping and shoving in the rat race to get to the top obsessed with our own status accolades remuneration confidence in the flesh now the Christian career is one of humble service a downward trajectory actually while we await exaltation from God our saviour the Christian career is a J curve or perhaps more like a limbo how low can you go in service to others or what will you cling to one of my old friends used to talk about how funny it is that so many Christians feel called by the Holy Spirit to be doctors and lawyers and professionals and nothing against doctors and lawyers and professionals by the way we love you very much but so many Christians feel called by the Holy Spirit into these kinds of high status jobs and no one seems to be called to be a garbage man or a checkout assistant or what have you in other words he used to say we seem to have a very middle class

Holy Spirit calling people into exactly the kinds of jobs that everyone else wants to get into anyway now of course that's just silliness and again please don't mishear me when it comes to having a doctor I really want a good one and I really want a good lawyer if I ever need one anyway I love you very much but it's the way the world views these professions that is offensive and outrageous and shows that they are enemies of the cross they don't get that we worship a tradie the most glorious man who ever lived was a carpenter and he appointed a bunch of rustic fishermen and notice Paul is saying here he's not saying I should say he's not saying well this is how I've chosen to live my life but you do you whatever works for you don't worry guys I'll try and live like Christ and I'll get on with Christ like sacrificial service you just kick back and relax and wait for his return just keep living like everyone else in comfort you know of course not

[ 43 : 37 ] Paul is urging us in this book to be gospel partners sharing in the work being of the same mind having the same love being in full accord and of one mind striving side by side for the work of the gospel so Paul is not painting himself here as some exceptional super apostle no quite the contrary he's calling all of us to run hard and straight in the direction that he himself went which is the following after the Lord Jesus down down down that life of humble sacrificial service seeking a love and ultimately even save others looking forward to the glorious hope of being perfect like Christ and exalted with him at the resurrection let's pray loving father we do pray that you would transform our minds help us to live like our Lord

Jesus Christ not obsessed with things of this world the confidence of the flesh whatever we do in our day to day how we behave in our family life in our neighbourhoods and communities we pray that we wouldn't be driven by worldly things but that we would be humble sacrificial servants like the Lord Jesus waiting for the day of exaltation and we will reign with him in glorious new bodies we ask these things in Jesus name Amen