

**Philippians: Heavenly Change**  
**Sermon 11-4-18**  
**Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**Philippians 3:12-4:1**

<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup>Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. <sup>16</sup>Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

<sup>17</sup>Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup>For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. <sup>19</sup>Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup>But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup>He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

**Message:**

Change. That dirty word. Change. Stop swearing Curtis. Stop saying the C-word. Change. That despicable word. Why do things change? Why do people change? How do people change? Why do the seasons change? Why does the wind change? Change, Change, Change. I'm not talking about dollars and cents though. Whether we like it or not, change is part of our lives. Some change is brought upon us. We don't want it and we don't want anything to do with it. Other changes we welcome with open arms. Maybe a marriage or a child. Maybe a new house. The only thing that is constant is change. When a change arrives, some of us jump right on board and others of us resist change until we have no other choice. Over the past 20 to 30 years what has been one of the most rapid changing markets? Technology. For example, every September, Apple announces their latest and newest gadgets. From the iPhone to the iPad to the iWatch. The latest is the iPhone Xs. The lowest version of this iPhone model goes for the retail cost of

\$749. The highest version goes for a whopping \$1449. Yes, this is just for a phone. But cost doesn't deter its loyalist of customers. It may surprise you that the night before the release of this phone, people camp-out at the retail stores to be among the first to buy the latest iPhone. On average, on the day of the release of the phone, people wait 7 hours in line to buy the phone. According to Pastor and writer, Carey Nieuwhof, people react differently to change. He creates 4 categories of how people react differently to change. These camp-out, wait in line for 7 hours and pay \$1449 for a phone would be among the first group. Nieuwhof would call them the Early Adopters. When change comes, they fully embrace the new thing. No questions asked. The sheer excitement of the new thing propels them to embrace it. The second group, Nieuwhof calls, Early Majority. This group may not be among the first to buy the latest iPhone, but after a few weeks or months of it being on the market, they may read some favorable reviews of the latest iPhone and their cell phone carrier, like Verizon or AT&T, may offer a deal to trade in their old iPhone for the newest iPhone at a lower cost. The third group is called: The Silent Majority. This group doesn't express any excitement over the new product at its first release. You won't see them ask questions publicly or even think anything of it. These people might say, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." They are the most hesitant to "buy-in" until its proven that the bang-is-worth-the-buck. These people may see the benefit of buying a new phone, but nothing is forcing them to change. When all the incentives are in their favor, then they move toward the change. So if the cell phone carrier is offering a great trade-in deal, your employer is offering a discount, by switching to the latest iPhone you lower the cost of your monthly cell phone plan and your old phone is failing, everything is moving you towards a purchase, then you jump on board in buying the latest iPhone. And the last group, as you may have predicted, is those who are in total Opposition to the change. These are the people who will never buy the latest iPhone. They will carry around that old flip phone until it holds a half-an-hour charge, the screen is unreadable and it randomly beeps making you think there is an imminent explosion about to happen. And even when they see the sense in getting a new phone, they will buy the cheapest thing they can buy. They have no interest in changing to the latest iPhone. Change is hard. We don't all buy-in right away. And some of us will never buy-in to the change.

So what's this got to do with Paul and Philippi? What's this got to do with Jesus? Well...let's take a look at our passage and find out. If you remember from last week, Paul talked at length about how much he deserved righteousness with God. He had the social status of being a circumcised Jew and a Pharisee. He used to be a strong adherent to the law. So in Jewish culture at the time he would be viewed as blameless or righteous before God. Paul had social status, riches and rightness with God, or so he thought. In our previous passage what does Paul say

about this? <sup>7</sup>Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup>More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.” So Paul continues on this thought process in our passage today, <sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup>Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” When Paul says “...obtained this...” he’s referring to the previous sentence in our previous passage, “...becoming like [Christ] in his death...” Paul is stating that he has not come to full spiritual maturity in Christ, but is striving to be more like Christ in His life AND in His death. By claiming he has not arrived yet, he recognizes the struggle, <sup>13</sup>Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...” How hard is it for us to let go of what lies behind? Incredibly hard. I can attest to this from some of the counseling I’ve done with others. I’m sure Christine can attest to the same. It is incredibly hard for people to let go of the past. It is incredibly hard for people to heal from their past. It is incredibly hard for people to let go of the so called glory days. But the harsh truth is this: you can’t go backwards in this life. As much as we would all love to go backwards at times, back to what was, it isn’t possible. Paul has every reason to stay in the old ways, in the old covenant. He could have all the comforts in the world if he would just stay in the old covenant. But he “strains forward to what lies ahead.” Why?

Why doesn’t Paul just stay where he is? Why does Paul give up all that he knows, loves and adores? Why doesn’t Paul urge Gentile Christians to follow the Law? “...<sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” Paul lets go of what is behind so that he may press forward toward the call of God. The heavenly call of God. Implied in these words of Paul is: if we want to move forward in God, if we want to get into the new thing God is doing, we can’t hold onto what lies behind. When we hear about the new thing God is doing, when we get excited about a new vision that God has for us, we have no problem buying into the new and exciting thing God is doing. But the problem doesn’t come with getting excited about the new thing God is doing. The problem is that we don’t count the cost. I love how Andy Stanley frames this in his new book, “Irresistible.” He says, “What you may find disturbing are the implications for the *old*. Jesus came to *replace* much of what was in place. New things don’t

generally bother us until we realize it means letting go of old, comfortable things. This explains why you kept that old couch after you purchased a new one. All that stuff in your attic, basement, or storage closet...you just can't seem to part with it, can you? That's human nature. And in the case of your closet, basement, or attic, it's harmless. The old couch in your basement in no way diminishes the enjoyment you get from the new one in your living room. But...as long as we cling to the *old*, Jesus came to *replace*, we will never fully appreciate, experience, or even recognize the *new* he came to put in place." To illustrate this a little more, John Diehl was sharing with me the other week how when Garry and Phyllis were getting ready to move, they had a dumpster. They had to clear out their home so that they could downsize and get their home ready for sale. Phyllis would take something from their home and put it in the dumpster. Well...the next thing you know, she later finds that same thing, that she threw out, back in the home. How did that get there? I'm sure you can imagine what happened. Yes, Garry was digging those things out of the dumpster. Garry and Phyllis knew that the time had come for them to make a radical change in their life. Was it hard for them? I'm sure it was. If Garry is any example, it was extremely hard to let go of those things that "...lie behind..." to move forward into the new thing that God is doing in their lives.

Now, you may be asking, can I bring the old into the new? Can I somehow retrofit what lies behind for what is ahead? Well...certainly many people try to do this. I used to watch this show on the History channel called "American Restoration." It was so neat to see them take old toys or old Coke dispensing machines that were beat up and rusted and bring them back to something beautiful. Do they serve their original function? Not really. They were mostly restored for nostalgic reasons. To have a conversation piece in one's home. But it was really neat to see it restored. Can we somehow take what was old to serve a new purpose in the Kingdom of God? To use an old Brethren practice, should we bring back the Holy Kiss? You know, how it says at the end of 1 Thessalonians to greet each other with the Holy Kiss. In the Brethren world, I don't think this kiss was on the cheek either. The holy kiss was given on the lips. Should we bring that practice back in a new way as we're instructed in 1 Thessalonians? Maybe this time we'll do it on the cheek. In terms of the Gospel, can we somehow take what is old and retrofit it for something new? Can we take the old law, the old testament and retrofit it for the new testament? As you know, many Jewish Christians tried to do just that. How did it work out? Not so well. Here's Andy Stanley's thoughts, "This is about ensuring that the life-changing new Jesus unleashed in the world doesn't get retrofitted with something old. Retro is fine for your middle school daughter's bedroom. It's not fine for the church. To paraphrase James, the brother of Jesus, this is about not making it unnecessarily difficult for those who are

turning to God. To paraphrase the apostle Paul, this is about winning some and saving some. For Christians with their backs to the culture waiting for Jesus to return, or worse, waiting for revival to break out so they don't have to do the hard stuff, what follows won't feel urgent. It may even feel threatening." By nature, the new thing God is doing in your life, the new thing God is doing at Providence, the new thing God is doing in this region, is threatening to the old.

Now, this is not to say that the old was worthless. The old, in terms of the gospel, served a purpose for a time. The Old Testament served its intended purpose for Israel. It was a covenant with Israel. Not us. One of the biggest things we get wrong when we hand someone a Bible for the first time is that we don't instruct them on how to read it. We just say, "Here you go. Read it." And when you crack open a new book, where do you naturally start? The beginning. At the front of the book. And then...most people don't make it past Leviticus. Why? Because it's not our covenant. The Old Testament is not a covenant for us. It's for Israel. I'm not challenging the authority or inspiration of scripture. As I've learned from Andy Stanley, the word "Testament" doesn't actually come from the original Greek. It comes from Latin. For the Catholic church whenever it was translated into Latin the "New Testament" was *novum testamentum* in Latin. If we were to translated straight from the Greek to English, it would translate as "New Covenant." But the translators decided to mix the Latin term with the English. So the Old Testament should be the "Old Covenant" and the New Testament should be the "New Covenant." It changes the meaning a little bit, doesn't it? So when we hand someone a Bible, why would we let them read the Old Covenant first when it's not the covenant they should be following? The Old Covenant was meant for Israel. The New Covenant is meant for believers in Christ. What did Jesus say about the law? "...I have come not to abolish the law but to fulfill." Fulfill, meaning that the law is completed. It's obsolete. It's not needed anymore. Jesus has come to bring a new way. Why do we have the Old Covenant? To give us the backstory to the New Covenant. How should we interpret the Old Covenant? Through the lens of the New Covenant. We should never try to bring Old Covenant ways to interpret the New Covenant ways. If we function under Old Covenant, its "eye for an eye." If we follow the New Covenant its, "...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." Under Old Covenant we have an endless list of laws to be right with God. If we follow the New Covenant the law is summed up as what? "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind." AND "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." What does Jesus say in his last breath on the cross? "It is finished." It's fulfilled. It's taken care of. If you think about all the bad rap Christianity gets, it's not because of the New Covenant in Jesus. It's because people pull from the Old Covenant. Or they try to bring Old Covenant on New Covenant. In Paul's

day, it was circumcision. In American History, it may have been the justification for slavery. Or the justification for the prosperity gospel—Old Covenant Theology. The Crusades happened because of theology derived from the Old Covenant. Not the New Covenant. The justification for war comes from views of the Old Covenant, not the New Covenant. What did Jesus come to do? To satisfy the Old Covenant and make us right with God. So that we may live freely in the New Covenant under Him. So why would we want to go back to Old Covenant when there is a better covenant in Jesus?

So what's this got to do with you and me? As hard as it is to change. I know...I gotta stop swearing with that C-word. As hard as it is to change, we have to stop trying to bring old into new. If we continue to try to bring old into new, we ruin the wine and the wineskin. We ruin the new thing that God is doing. As sad as it is for us to let go of what is old to embrace the new thing God is doing in our lives, it is the only way to fully move into the new. The more we hang on to the old movement of God, the more we ruin the new movement of God. The more we deter people from the cross. The more we misrepresent Jesus. Paul recognizes how difficult this is, <sup>15</sup>“Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. <sup>16</sup>Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.” The “same mind” Paul speaks of is not about just getting along or cooperating with one another. It's not about compromising. It's not even having theological agreements. The “same mind” is about having the mind of Christ. Those who are mature will seek the mind of Christ and because they see the thing that Christ is doing in our midst, they will be one with each other. But it takes a humble spirit to go before Christ and ask to receive His mind. It's not for the proud or for those who have certainty. For those who think they know the mind of Christ. It's for those who have a servant heart and those who listen carefully for His voice.

You know, I used to think that as we re-build the church or the Church of the Brethren from numerical decline, that we could just retrofit the old with the new way God is moving. I'm starting to be convinced that the more we try to make the old fit in with the new, the more we hinder the work of God in our midst. What if God is calling us to let go of “...what lies behind...” so that we may press forward into “...what lies ahead...”? And I'm not going to lie, it saddens me to let go what lies behind. It saddens me to let go of what was. It saddens me to let go of Church of the Brethren traditions that carried incredible value at one point in time. But what if the very thing that's preventing us from moving forward is the thing that we are holding onto that lies behind? If that's not painful enough, when we move forward into the new thing God is doing here at Providence or you move into the new thing God is doing in your life, it means that people are going to be left behind. If we go back to those four categories of people of how they react to

change. There are going to be people who are in total opposition. Nieuwhof says this, “Although they claim to be going somewhere, opponents typically have a vision for the past, not for the future.” Paul, tragically, says something similar, “<sup>18</sup>For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. <sup>19</sup>Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.”

So what is Paul calling the Philippians towards? What is God calling us towards? “<sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” And skipping forward to verse 20, “<sup>20</sup>But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup>He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.” The call is to seek the things that are bound for heaven. God is continually calling each and every one of us to transformation to be conformed to His glory. To move into the new thing that God is doing.

Change is hard. It’s hard to let go of what lies behind. If you seek the mind of Christ though, I can guarantee you, you won’t be disappointed. The joy, the fulfillment of seeking the new thing God is doing is the prize of the heavenly thing God is doing. It’s not escapism. It’s not simply waiting for death for afterlife. God wants to bring heaven to earth. There are people that are going to go for the wrong prize. They are going to go for the prizes of this earth. They are going to be people among us who prize the things of the past. The old covenant. The Old way. But, the new way is through is Christ. There is freedom in the new thing Christ is doing. What new thing is Christ calling you towards but you can’t go there because your holding onto what lies behind? What heavenly thing is Christ calling you into? What heavenly bound thing is God calling Providence into? I’m not saying I know the answer to those questions, but God does. So, I urge you, stop holding on to what was, as meaningful as it was, so that you can jump on the heavenly thing, the heavenly change, that God is working among you and among us. God has greater things in store for you. God has greater things in store for us. Let’s live vibrantly in the new covenant. Let’s embrace what God has laid before us. Let’s live in the light and the love of Jesus Christ. Let’s embrace the heavenly call of God. Amen.