

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God
IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Paul's 3:11 Verses—Good News for All

One day during my meditative time, the thought came to me to look at verse 3:11 in Paul's epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. When I did, I discovered something quite interesting.

Before looking at these verses, a word is needed about the origin of biblical chapters and verses. The original writers of scripture did not break down their material into chapter and verse; this came much later through the efforts of others. It is doubtful that any of the original writers even knew or considered that one day their material would be canonized and organized into what we call the *Bible*. In 1227 AD, Stephen Langton, a professor at the University of Paris who later became the Archbishop of Canterbury, divided the Bible into chapters. In 1448 AD, a Jewish rabbi named Nathan divided the old testament into verses, and, in 1551 AD, a French printer named Robert Stephanus divided the Greek new testament into verses. Whether the Lord led these men in these endeavors we do not know, but we do know that the result of their work has been a great help in navigating scripture.

Now, on to the 3:11 verses—as I looked at them, I realized that strung together as one sentence they form a uniform thought. Here is how they read all together. The bracketed words are inserted for continuity.

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH, according to a purpose of the ages, which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord, if by any means I [the righteous] might arrive at the goal, namely, the out-resurrection from among those who are dead, where there is no Greek or Jew, no one with circumcision or without circumcision, no division between nations, no servant or free man: but Christ is all and in all.

Man might have organized the chapters and verses, but I see the hand of God in this, for this makes for a mighty powerful declaration of truth, so much so that we can only briefly touch upon it. Now, let's look at each verse to see what they might tell us as a whole.

The righteous shall live by faith. (Galatians 3:11 ASV)

Paul quoted from Habakkuk 2:4 not only in Galatians but also in Romans 1:17 (also found in Hebrews 10:38). As a former Pharisee, Paul knew what it was like to seek after one's own righteousness, especially under the law. He testified: *As to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless* (Philippians 3:6). But after Jesus broke into his life on the road to Damascus, Paul realized that his righteousness was not enough. As it is written, *There is none righteous, no, not one* (Romans 3:10). The indictment of man is made quite plain through Isaiah: *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away* (Isaiah 64:6).

Paul's eyes were opened to see that the only way through is *not having my righteousness, which is of law, but that which is through the faith of Christ – the righteousness that is of God by the faith* (Philippians 3:9) The JM-NT words *through the faith of Christ as through means of Christ's faith*. In other words, righteousness comes not through our faith (i.e., our faith *in*) but through Christ's faith (the faith *of*), so that our boast is entirely in the Lord. In His Son, God brings salvation to all mankind. As Paul declared: *But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption* (1 Corinthians 1:30). Jeremiah declared: *The Lord our righteousness* (Jeremiah 23:6). Consequently, those in Christ have His righteousness and are to live by *the faith*, the faith of the Son, holding to His righteousness.

According to a purpose of the ages, which He made [makes] in Christ Jesus our Lord.... (Ephesians 3:11 YLT [CLV])

Most translations that have injected the interpretative bias of the word *eternal* use the expression *the eternal purpose of God*; however, this is incorrect. The Greek word used in this verse is *aion*, which is *age*, meaning a period of time or a long duration of time. It does not refer to endlessness or forever. Eternal purpose of God makes it sound like God has a never-ending purpose or one that is outside of time. Again, this is incorrect. The key to understanding this is not only in the word *aion* but also in what follows—*which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord*. This clause refers back to the ages, meaning the ages were made in Christ. This is further confirmed in Hebrews: *God ... in these last days speaks to us in a Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom He also makes the ages* (Hebrews 1:2). The Son makes the ages, which means that the ages have something to do with Jesus. Many make a big deal about the eternal side of God to the point of suggesting that God is so outside of time that He is not interested in time and our future has nothing to do with time. This couldn't be further from the truth. If it were true, it would mean that the Father is not interested in what His Son is doing in and through the ages He made. This is folly. The Father is vested in His Son, and this means the ages have great purpose to God. The fact of the matter is that the ages are all about His Son. In Christ is a purpose of the ages, meaning time itself has meaning, and this meaning is found and explained in the Son. Time has purpose; leave the Son out of the ages and time has no meaning. It behooves the righteous to know this purpose and to live by faith according to it. Hold on; we will come to the purpose.

If by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the out-resurrection from among those who are dead. (Philippians 3:11 Wuest)

Paul not only saw a purpose of the ages in Christ but also a goal or something that he had to attain, namely, the out-resurrection from among the dead. Paul was not seeking to attain only a spiritual resurrection while in his body of death, as so many today seem to think. No; he was seeking for a future resurrection just like His Lord's resurrection; it is a resurrection *from* the dead. Paul makes this quite clear: *And more than that, we ourselves, though we possess the Spirit as a foretaste and pledge of the glorious future, yet we ourselves inwardly sigh, as we wait and long for open recognition as sons through the deliverance of our bodies* (Romans 8:23 WNT).

Where there is no Greek or Jew, no one with circumcision or without circumcision, no division between nations, no servant or free man: but Christ is all and in all. (Colossians 3:11 BBE)

In the out-resurrection, there is absolutely no division of people based on the flesh or any other criteria, for that matter. There is only one criterion, and that is in Christ. This is the one new man that is *the Christ-man* or *the fully Anointed-man*. Coming into the presence of the Father is not based on anything any of us can bring before Him in our flesh. It is all based on God's Son. But there is much more, for in this, we discover that the ages were made through the Son for the purpose of Him becoming all and in all. Paul described it as *the summing up or heading up of all things in the Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth* (Ephesians 1:10). Paul stated it another way: *For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven* (Colossians 1:19-20). The purpose of the ages is to head up, reconcile, and subject all things to the Son, the Christ. But it does not stop here, for this purpose is to achieve a much grander ultimate purpose, also given to us by Paul: *When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all* (1 Corinthians 15:28). This is God's ultimate purpose; and the ages have been made in His Son to achieve this purpose, all to the glory of the Father and His Son.

As for the righteous, we are to live by *the* faith of the Son through whom the Father makes the ages and fulfills His grand purpose of *ALL*. With this purpose in view, let us, by His faith, press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). It is not about dying and going to heaven as a disembodied spirit. The upward call is the *out-resurrection*; it is the rising up from our mortal bodies into Christ's immortal body; swallowing up this mortal with life, being conformed to the body of His glory (Philippians 3:21).

This is the expectation of the righteous.