

## Philippians 3:12-16

### "Forget The Past, Press Toward The Future"

We stood last upon a "summit peak" (so to speak) of Phil Ch 3. Paul had been addressing the real problem of the temptation of adopting a legalistic approach or an entitled mentality as it pertains to being considered "right" in the sight of God.

They were facing in *that* day issues that are not uncommon in *our* day & that was a group of people who had no problem with Jesus, in fact they would say that you needed to *believe* in Jesus to be saved... But you also needed to do a few other things, namely be *circumcised & honor the law of Moses*. & Though those *particular* things may not be what we face today. Still, there is a significant group of people who would seek to impose upon you that believing in Jesus is good, but unless you're baptized, you're not saved. Or unless you keep the sabbath or join their church or do whatever particular protocol they've adopted, you can't be saved.

But Paul vehemently rejected such a position. He maintained adamantly that salvation is not something that you can inherit nor achieve. That it's not about what you do, but rather trusting wholeheartedly in what Christ has done. That salvation is all about Jesus, it has nothing to do w/me. That when Jesus said "it is finished" upon the cross, that's what He meant & that the sacrifice of Jesus, the shedding of His blood is sufficient to cleanse me of *all* my sin before God.

Paul insisted that everything he'd *inherited* (being born of a Jewish family, into a premier tribe, circumcised the 8<sup>th</sup> day, having been raised by parents who sought to honor God) & everything he'd *achieved* (becoming a Pharisee, moving in zeal that surpassed his contemporaries, an outward accomplishment of keeping the law) he counted as garbage. Everything he thought was helping him was in reality hindering him because it caused him to take confidence in the flesh rather than place faith in J.C.

He told the Philippians that he'd thrown all that away the moment he met Jesus & now some 30 yrs later he was more convinced than ever that every effort in self-righteousness was to be rejected that he might gain Christ (look at Vs 9).

### Vs 9-11

What an incredible reflection of Paul's personal commitment to Christ. He (like you & me) went "all in" on J.C. In essence he was saying that he couldn't care less about what the flesh might accomplish, he wanted to know Jesus & the fullness of who *He* is. Ladies & Gentlemen, that is *not* the focus of the legalist.

The legalist's focus isn't on Jesus (& knowing Jesus), it's always on *self*...

“Have *I* done enough? Am *I* good enough?” The legalist isn’t nearly as concerned w/ knowing Jesus as he is w/ knowing his own list of achievements & accomplishments. Paul had a passion to know Jesus deeply, to experience Him fully. & I think that passion resonates in the heart of every believer. I trust that if you’ve been saved *by* Jesus, then deep down in there, you really want to *know* Jesus, you want to be conformed into the image of Jesus... That was the hunger of Paul’s heart. Now look at Vs 12

### Vs 12-14

Well, Ladies & Gentlemen, Paul just leapt from the summit peak into the stratosphere. But notice that he does so, *not* through some kind of super spiritual rhetoric. “I’ve come to the point where the passion of my life is to know J.C. & the power of His resurrection, & the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death... & one day if you’re disciplined enough, maybe you lowly believers can arrive where I am...”

That’s not his mentality at all! Look what he says in Vs 12. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected;” Paul’s attitude wasn’t that he’d reached some level where now he’d arrived & could kind of kick back in his spiritual life. Even though we can see so clearly that he was writing from a place of such spiritual maturity & purity that we might anticipate that he believed he’d gained an established victory over spiritual difficulties & saw himself as having arrived practically at perfection, he says, “No way!”

He was not confused concerning who he was & who he was not. To the contrary when you study his life you realize that longer he *lived*, the closer to Christ he *became*, the more cognizant of his *imperfection* & sin nature he was!

Many of you have probably followed his journey before & you’ve picked up on the same thing. There was a time when he said of himself, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”<sup>1</sup> A # of yrs later; writing to the Eph he said, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,”<sup>2</sup> He went from saying that he was the least of the apostles to considering himself *less than the least* of all the saints. Family, that’s not even a possibility, yet that’s his humility. You’re either the least, or you’re not, you can’t be less than the least, that makes *you* the least 😊.

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Co 15:9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Eph 3:8]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But toward the end of his life he wrote these words, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."*<sup>3</sup> From the least of the apostles, to less than the least of the saints, to the chief of sinners...

In his pursuit of Christ, he was elevated in his heart so as to arrive at a place of perfection, he became all the more cognizant of the sin nature that warred w/in him. "Not that I have already attained, or am perfected (I'm not complete, I haven't arrived at full Christ like maturity); *but* I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."

Few things we want to note here. #1 Paul recognized that as long as he lived in this body there would be an ever present need to grow. He wasn't going to arrive at some place of being completely perfect, no more room for improvement, I'm as complete in my being as is Christ Himself... No. No, a thousand times No! "But" #2 "I press on", he refused to be satisfied w/where he was at spiritually, his burden was to progress & grow.

When he speaks of "pressing" it's an athletic term. In the last section of scripture we saw Paul the *accountant*. He "counted" his inheritance, his achievements as rubbish. Here we're seeing Paul the *athlete*. He's pressing, it's the picture of the runner on the final stretch pressing, chest forward, giving it everything he's got to get across that finish line in 1<sup>st</sup> place. He refused to be satisfied, he refused to coast, refused to cruise. Too many Christians are satisfied w/themselves. Satisfied w/where they're at, content to coast. The tendency is to compare their "race" w/other Christians whom they consider to be not making as much progress as perhaps they are.

If Paul had the opportunity to compare where he was at spiritually w/where I'm at, or perhaps where you're at, he'd have been tempted to be proud, maybe let up a bit. We don't hardly stand in his shadow (as it pertains to what he experienced the things he accomplished for the glory of God), much less run alongside him... But Paul didn't compare himself to others. J.C. was his standard & he knew he fell far short of that & was inspired, convicted & motivated to keep pressing forward.

Be careful of evaluating yourself in a way that gives you a false sense of assurance. Read Ch's 2-3 of the book of Rev. Sardis had "a name" that they lived when they were dead! Reputation w/out reality! Laodicea boasted of riches when God saw them as wretched, miserable, poor, blind & naked! Samson thought the power of God was still w/him when it reality it'd departed *from* him...

<sup>3</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (1 Ti 1:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Self-evaluation can be a dangerous thing, because we can err in 2 directions. We can make ourselves better than we are, or make our-selves worse than we are. Neither of which is healthy.

There are many Christian leaders today who would have you think that *they have* attained. Oh, they may not say that, but the image they put forth is one of constant triumph, they live in nothing but victory, they've arrived. Paul knew nothing of that...

Jesus said that we have to come to Him as a child... You know, the 3 yr old thinks everything will be great when he/she is 5. The 5 yr old can't wait to be 7. The 10 yr old wants to be 13 & when you're 13 you're itching to drive... There's a constant underlying desire for growth; & that's the way it's to be in our lives as believers.

We're to continually "press on". As Jesus exhorted us, when we grab hold of the plow, we don't look back. Why? To what end? For what purpose? "That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."

What does that mean? We speak of it from time to time around here. You should know that when Jesus laid hold of your life, that's not where it ends, that's where it *begins*. He has a plan *for* you, things He wants to accomplish *through* you. Whether He pulled you up *out* of the pit, or you were blessed to be saved *from* the pit (you've had the privilege of knowing the Lord your whole life), there's a *reason* for it.

To the Eph Paul said it like this, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."<sup>4</sup> Each & every one of you who *know* J.C. have been laid hold of by J.C. Have you ever stopped to think about why? Paul knew that Jesus laid hold of him. It's right there in Acts Ch 9, you might jot it down & look it up later

He was on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus when Jesus stopped him in his tracks. The light shown *around* him, Jesus began to make Himself real *to* him. & When Paul realized who it was he said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"<sup>5</sup> What about you? Have you ever asked the Lord that question? "What do You want me to do?" "God I want to focus my efforts, my energies, my time, talent & treasure toward *Your* will, not my own."

Listen, there are some general things that God wants to work through us *all*. He laid hold of you to make you a light, that you might be salt, creating thirst in others for what it is that *you have in Him*.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Eph 2:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ac 9:6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Be it at work, at school, in the gym, wherever you are, whatever you're doing. He's ordained that you would be there because He has a plan to use you in that place, are you available to Him? God has gifted you in certain ways, placed desires in your heart. How are you putting those things to use for His glory? Think about it, act on it. Refuse to be lethargic about it.

Paul says, "I haven't arrived, I haven't apprehended, but (notice Vs 13) *one thing* I do." There was a determination about the apostle, a focus... (We put a video out on NY day asking people, "What's 1 thing you want to see rooted in your life in 2019? Just get it out there, commit to it, be accountable about it, get it in writing. One said, "To focus on God's will". Another said, "Take more time for Him". I said, "To grow as a leader & develop other leaders." Here's what Paul would say, "To forget those things which are behind & reach forward to those things which are ahead.")

He knew that the reason for which God still had him breathing was ahead of him, not behind him. So he was focused on that one thing. Too many of us spread ourselves thin getting involved in "many things". **God would say, "Narrow your scope, the secret of progress is to focus on the *one thing*."** Jesus told the rich young ruler he lacked "one thing". He explained to Martha "one thing" that was needed in her life. The psalmist said, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, & *that* will I seek after." Ps 27:4

No athlete wins by doing everything, they specialize in doing 1 thing & sacrifice other things that would distract them from the 1 thing. They're devoted to their "calling". Determination & concentration is the secret of power. We've got to refuse to be distracted & purpose to devoted to that for which Christ has laid hold of us.

**Forget those things which are behind. Don't dwell in the past. Way too many Christians are crippled in the present because of the past. Perhaps something they've done, or they can't get beyond what someone else has done to them... Satan loves to cripple you through condemnation.** Paul had been party to having Christians killed, beaten, imprisoned! He ripped families apart, breathed "murderous threats" against the church! Don't think for a minute he never thought about that... That Satan never condemned him for that. But he knew that if anyone be in Christ they're a new creation, old things pass away, behold all things become new.

**God's grace is sufficient for you. Don't dwell in the past, live in the present. Let's not focus on what we've done (successfully) or what's been done to us (negatively), but what it is we need to do *now* (for God's glory).**

The things in Paul's past that could've worked in him for *condemnation* he turned to *inspiration* to reaching forward & doing even more for the glory of God.

In the book of Isaiah; God said it like this, *"Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert."*<sup>6</sup>

So I ask again, Spiritually, what are you reaching forward toward, right now? What new thing are you praying about today? What are some of the desires/burdens God has placed on your heart & what are you doing about it? What plans do you have to press forward in it?

Because in the end, God has a reward for you, the "prize" of the upward call, the high call, the heavenly call of God that's in Christ Jesus. Think of all the work you put in for the reward of a decent retirement, or win a trophy, or a belt or some earthly "prize". How much more determination should we put forth for the eternal reward?

Guys, I want the prize! I want to hear the word, "Well done, good & faithful servant..." That doesn't happen through focusing *on* or getting tripped up *by* the past, but by reaching forward to that which lies ahead...

We want to get to the finish line. We want the prize. We want to hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant". You don't do that by focusing on the past, but pressing forward into what lies ahead. Pressing toward the goal, laying hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of you...

**Vs 15-16**

"Let us, as many as are mature, have this mind:" what mind? The mind that refuses to be distracted (in one way or another) by the past & determines to reach forward to that which lies ahead. The mind that realizes, "I haven't arrived, I need to grow & I'm going to cast distracting cares upon the Lord because He cares for me that I might seek Him, be more like Him & by His grace & the power of His Spirit lay hold of that for which He's laid hold of me."

& To those who were content where they were, who thought they'd gone far enough & didn't need to reach any farther forward he says, "I trust that God is big enough to show them their need."

"Nevertheless, to the degree we've already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind."

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 43:18-19]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The idea being, “What we *don't* know can excuse our failing in what we *do* know.” You may not know God’s calling “specifically” or feel like you need to grow *personally* (God will reveal that to you). But what you *do* know is that God has called us to love one another, to be a light, to be salt, to serve Him through serving one another, you get the idea... To the degree we’ve attained, let us walk by the same rule.

Stay on that track, keep pressing in that direction, let us be of the same mind. There’s to be unity among us... Pressure from one direction or the other should push us together, not drive us apart.

So we keep going (honoring the Lord, loving Him, serving Him) until the day Jesus calls us home. To the Galatians he said it like this, *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*<sup>7</sup>

Forget those things which are behind you, focus on what lies ahead of you & press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Amen? Amen.

### Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the exhortation of Your Word. That You love us, You want to do something new through us. Help us respond appropriately, to honor you & move forward in faith for Your glory. I pray for anyone here who may be bogged down, burdened by their past. God that You would break that bond, set them free that they no longer be influenced or molded by those things. But that they press forward & lay hold of that for which You have laid hold of them.

& If you’ve been running from the Lord, He wants to lay hold of you, get a grip on you right here, right now. He loves you w/an everlasting love. He’s died on the cross for your sin & you can become a new creation in Him, even today. Turn from your sin, trust in Him.

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ga 6:9-10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.