

Philippians 3:12-16

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on September 9, 2007

Marks of a True Believer: Pressing on! Part 4

Prayer

Father, we sing about Your love. We praise You for it. And we know, Father, that Your love is currently demonstrated in the fact that in while we were yet sinners, Your Son Christ died for us. Father, we praise You for what He did. And we praise You for what He is doing. We praise You for what He will do in our lives. Father, I recognize that there is no way I can share Your Word in a way that brings You glory apart from Your total intervention. And, Father, I pray that everyone recognizes here we cannot understand Your Word apart from You opening our hearts. I pray we would humbly come before Your Word, receive it, implant it, be not just hearers and then forgetters but hearers and by Your power and strength, doers. So that by Your strength and power, You would be glorified. Bless Your Word now as it goes out. And now we pray this in Jesus' Name.

Sermon

Well, if you have been a believer for a very long time, you will recognize, as you have maybe gone from church to church or have friends who are believers, that there are many, baby, kind of worldly-slanted, carnal Christians (I do not know if it is possible to be a carnal Christian), but people who claim the name of Christ, who really do not understand what it means to be a Christian on a day-by-day, moment-by-moment basis. They may have come to a place where they believed the Gospel, they accepted it by faith that Jesus is Lord by faith. But yet they have never grown from that point. In the book of Hebrews, the writer of Hebrews says that time sufficient has passed that you should be teachers by now but you need the milk and not (ultimately) the deeper truths which are built on those basic truths which never go away.

So often we see that and so often people will share the Gospel or share Christ with people and then they leave it at that. And we think about a hospital. If a baby was born and they just left it there and no one cared for it, what kind of care would that be? God is a gracious God, in His sovereignty He comes alongside those who are truly His and He gives us in His Word where we go from when we get saved, where we should be going, the direction we should be heading as believers. And I believe today we are going to see in this passage the answer to the question "Where do we go from here?" as we have a look at Paul's testimony in Philippians chapter 3. Where do we go when we have been saved? What do we do, what do we focus on? What is our direction? What are our goals or goal? Turn your Bibles with me to Philippians chapter 3. A lot of acronymns in how to find it: GEPC, General Electric Power Company, there is another one that has to do with a Jew/Gentile illustration I won't mention. Gentiles eat pork chops, that is basically the way to identify where Philippians is.

Ok. With that in mind, we are in the book of Philippians, a wonderful, wonderful book. It is a letter from the apostle Paul to a church that he loves dearly. A church that loves him. They have sent Epaphroditus to help him. They are very concerned for him. They have supported him financially. They care deeply

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about the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul writes this letter while he is in chains, but he makes it clear that the Gospel is not in chains, that God has used his circumstances for the greater progress of the Gospel. And that Christ is being magnified through his life. We have seen that in his circumstances he is imprisoned, but the Gospel is not. We have seen Paul's attitude: to live is Christ, for the benefit of the body of Christ. To die is gain, to be with Christ.

And we have seen the exhortation to the Philippians for their mindset, for their attitudes to be right. They were to be united in spirit, they were to be humble, they were to be like Christ Jesus. They were to consider others as more important than themselves. They were to be other-focused, ultimately, submitting themselves to Christ. The example of Christ- perfect, humble submission, who came and humbly took on human flesh, lived the perfect life, was obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Therefore, God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father. Wonderful, wonderful truths about the attitude of Christ. And he says, "Have this mind in you." This same thinking. And we saw, ultimately, that we should be (because God is at work in us) working out our salvation with fear and trembling. That we should not be complaining and arguing; obviously that shows that we do not recognize the Lordship of Christ if we are complaining over our circumstances. And we saw three selfless examples that Paul gives of the mindset of humility. We saw Paul himself, we saw Timothy, we saw Epaphroditus.

And then in chapter 3, we saw how we were to keep from being ensnared or trapped or caught up by false teachers. First of all, Paul mentioned that we should have the right attitude. We should be rejoicing in the Lord. We should be rejoicing in the context of our relationship with the Lord. We should be heeding the warnings. It is no trouble for Paul to warn them, that "It is a safeguard for you" he writes. He writes to these Philippians essentially that "It is a safeguard to hold you up and protect you in your relationship with Jesus Christ."

And then we saw Paul's exhortation to the Philippians believers to beware three times. Beware of the dogs and the evil workers and the false brethren. And then we saw Paul giving an example of how you can identify the false from the true. He says, "For we are the true circumcision" and he gives three things, "Who worship in the Spirit of God", not in the flesh, a fleshy show of excitement in the flesh but in the Spirit of God. "Glory in Christ Jesus", not in self or others. "And put no confidence in the flesh". That is the true brethren versus the false brethren. Here you go, beware of this and here is who we are, the true brethren here, Paul says. And then at this point, Paul uses his own testimony to elaborate on what a true believer looks like in light of the false brethren, that they are to be aware of. And that is what we are looking at today. We started this portion a couple of weeks ago, and we are going to (Lord-willing) finish this first portion today in verses 12-16. But I want to remind you of the context because it is not disconnected from verse 1-3 which I just explained. And it is not disconnected from verse 4-11 that we have looked at in the previous week. So would you turn with me, and we are going to read Philippians 3. We are going to start at verse 4 to get the context here.

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⁴although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: (Paul had a great list of spiritual gains before Christ, he thought.⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.(Paul had a great list of religious accomplishments that he considered gain in his relationship with God. But he says, verse 7,⁷**But whatever things were gain** (Were gain, constantly in the past.) **to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**(I have counted it as loss for the sake of Christ.)⁸**More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, [Philippians 3:4-8]**

The apostle Paul evidently came to a true saving knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ at the road to Damascus. He did not know Jesus at that time. He said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" He did not know who He was. But then he believed in Him and then soon after that we see in Acts, he preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins, that Jesus is Lord. And Paul counted everything that he trusted in and focused on before Christ as rubbish, in order that he might gain Christ. And it was all religious stuff in Paul's case. And he had a long list of things that he could say were to his benefit or gain religiously. And until he counted it all as dung, literally, he was not saved. And he counted it as dung, in order that he might gain Christ and be found in Him with the righteousness not derived from legalistic Law-keeping but derived from faith in Christ. That is what we have seen in the last few weeks, that Paul was justified. He was declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. And we saw last week his great desire to know Christ. If you have truly been saved, you are going to want to know Jesus Christ, to walk with Him intimately and also to be like Him. That is what should happen to you if you are truly saved. And that is the testimony of the apostle Paul. We saw last week that Paul had a deep desire to know Christ and to be like Him.

Verse 10. **"That I may know Him** (That is not "know about Him." That is know, relationally, walk with, have a relationship with the living Lord. Know Him.) **and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."** [Philippians 3:10-11] It was a complex passage we looked at last week. You can listen to the tape. But ultimately he is saying, "Knowing Him is being identified with Him, being conformed to His death, the fellowship of His sufferings ultimately that he would experience His resurrection power and His resurrection life." That is what Paul wanted to see. We looked at that phrase in verse 11, "In order that I may attain to the resurrection." Was he talking about the ultimate resurrection? We thought, because of the word, he says "out-resurrection." And most people agree in context he is speaking of living a resurrected life. Christ living through you. As you are conformed to His death, Christ manifests His life in you. 2 Corinthians chapter 4. 2 Corinthians chapter 1. Paul says, "We were brought to the point of death in order that we would not trust in ourselves but the God who raises the dead." That is life, trusting Christ, walking with Him, and His life then manifest to us.

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I believe the idea being conveyed here, as we will see today, is the idea that Paul conveyed in Romans 6, of being united with Christ in His death and then united in His resurrection life. And we are going to talk about that more today.

Paul wanted to know Christ and His power, resurrection power, and understand that through suffering and death to self this is accomplished. That is the means in which Christ manifests Himself in our lives. As we suffer, we yield up our wills and He brings about the manifestation of His life and will in us. And we experience practically, on a practical basis, the life of Christ in the midst of a dead world. The out-resurrection from the dead.

So we have seen that Paul had a deep desire to know Christ and be like Him. But where do we go from there? You have come to faith in Jesus Christ, you want to know Him, you want to be like Him, you love Him, but where do we go from there? And this is what I believe we will see today in our verse, 12-16. That Paul's mind is revealed to us, that he pressed forward towards that goal of knowing Christ and thus being like Christ. Let's take a look at our passage, verse 12.

¹² Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; ¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. [Philippians 3:12-16]

Well, folks, if you have heard the passage- Nick read it and you listened to it right now when I read it- you know that this passage is about pressing on. It is about pressing forward with a single purpose and a single focus (as we will see) to be complete, to be mature, to be Christ-like as we will see. It is pressing on towards the goal (singular) and the prize which is encompassed in reaching that goal.

Now, Paul at this point starts to use athletic metaphors. And the term "press on" is not an athletic term at all, as we will see. But there are two other terms in our passages that are athletic. The term "goal" speaks of "the mark." That mark that you run past when you complete the race. And the term "prize" speaks specifically to the award given to victors in the games, of the Olympic games. It is specifically "the prize." It is given to the one who wins. It is not given to the people who lose, it is given to the ones who win.

And here we see in verse 12 the term "press on" and in verse 14 we see it also, "press on." And the word in Greek, *dioko*, is a common word in Scripture. It is actually used earlier back in verse 6- "as to zeal (*dioko*) of the church, persecutor". Well, how is a persecutor and "press on" the same word? Ultimately, this word speaks of pursuing. Pursuing something. Focused on, pursuing, "I press on". Persecutors pursue the people they are persecuting. And that is why this word is used in that context.

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So Paul was a pursuer of the church and those in the church, and now he is a pursuer of the goal in Jesus Christ. What an incredible difference from what Paul did before. He pursued self-righteousness and now he pursues Christ. We have the metaphor of Paul pressing on towards the goal, the prize. The metaphor is the picture of an athlete running as hard as he can, pursuing one thing, the goal, the prize. And it is a metaphor that we can all understand. It should be no mystery to what Paul is saying here in this passage.

But notice Paul recognizes that he has not gotten there yet. Verse 12. "Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on (continually)..." Verse 12 is a continuation of what he has been sharing already in verse 11, which he says clearly that he has not obtained it. He is speaking back to what he was talking about earlier, this being conformed to His death and brought about to this resurrection, this out-resurrection. But we still maybe do not understand what that means. And he is going to continue, and it is going to help us. He says here, "not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect." Now we are going to start to see what he is talking about. He explains it in a different way for us. "But I press on." This word "obtain" speaks of laying hold of. He has not laid hold of it yet. So what is he talking about? Notice in parallel he says, "Or have already become perfect." What is he talking about there? The word "perfect" is a common word also in Greek, *teleioo*. It is a verb here, it speaks of perfection, completeness or maturity. And it is translated those ways and in those contexts all throughout Scripture. Perfection, completeness, or maturity. And it is interesting, even in our passage here we have this same word used twice in two different shades of the meaning. Look down at verse 15. "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect..." Well, wait a second. He just said I have not made it and I am not perfect. And here he says he is perfect. Obviously the context is different, and we are going to see that. Clearly in verse 12 he says he has not gotten there; in verse 15 he says "Many of us who are perfect." So ultimately we need to understand the answer to what we would think is a contradiction, is a way the word is used. It can speak of perfection or completeness or it can speak of maturity. And we will see that. And we will see that a little later too.

So Paul is saying first then (back to our portion), "Hey, I am not complete yet. I am not complete yet. I have not made it yet. I am not there yet. Christ is not living fully through me every moment, every minute of the day. His resurrection life is not fully manifest in me all the time. I have not made it yet." And we know ultimately that we on this earth will not make it completely on this earth. No one will ever have Christ's life fully manifest in them every minute of the day. John says in 1 John 1:8, "**If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**" [1 John 1:8] If we say we have made it, sinless perfection as some denominations wrongly would teach, John clearly says it is not possible. And if we say it, the truth is not in us, we are not saved. That is John's words for saying someone is not saved, the truth is not in you. If you think you have no sin at all, you are in deep trouble. Paul says, "I have not made it yet. I have not made it yet."

And let me say this loud and clear again, no believer will ever become perfect in this life. But let me say this loud and clear, too, that we are not to settle with where we are at right now because of that truth. We are to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are to excel still more, as Paul told the Thessalonians. And later on in our passage, it says, "See to it that you do not go

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back to from what you have obtained. We are not to settle for less, we are to press forward towards that goal. We are never going to make it but we are going to get there ultimately. It is like the child who, when you have left for a long five, ten hour journey, ten minutes says later, "Are we there yet?" No we are not there yet, but we are on our way and we are going there. Just because we are not there yet does not mean we stop and say, "Ok, we are not going to make it." We are on our way. Paul presses forward towards the goal but he is not there yet, right? Does that make sense? It is pretty self explanatory.

Now, sometimes we need to recognize that Scripture gives us three aspects of *teleioo* or perfection. Translated "perfection, completeness or maturity." Scripture reveals three elements in relationship to the believer concerning this idea of completeness. For example, when we are justified by faith... what do I mean? When God declares we are righteous because we have believed in Jesus and His redemption applies to us, when God says, "They are righteous." When we are justified, as Paul shared earlier in this passage, then we are seen in the perfect righteousness of Christ. Hebrews 10:14. I will share this. "**For by one offering** (not a bunch of offerings. Not a bunch of offerings every week but by one offering, that is Christ) **He has perfected** (It has already happened. That is *teleioo*) **for all time those who are sanctified.**" [Hebrews 10:14] So in some sense, we are perfected in position. We are seen as perfected although we are not perfect yet, right? Then also, we have other Scriptures that show that God is perfecting us now. 2 Corinthians 7:1. After the apostle Paul tells these believers to be separate from the influences of these false teachers, to be not equally yoked. And if you separate, if you come out from their midst, if you do not touch what is unclean, God will be your Father and you will be His sons. There will be this relationship between you and he says right at that point, 2 Corinthians 7:1. "**Therefore, having these promises** (of what God will do if you are separate), **beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting** (*teleioo*, being complete, being made mature) **holiness in the fear of God.**" [2 Corinthians 7:1]

God is perfecting in the moment, right now, making us more like Christ. Ephesians 4:11

¹¹ **And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,** ¹² **for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;** (and here is the goal) ¹³ **until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a (*teleioos*) mature man,** (complete man).... [Ephesians 3:11-13a]

Colossians 1:18. I shared it earlier.

²⁸ **And we proclaim Him,** (Paul says. We proclaim Christ.) **admonishing every man** (that is warning) **and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man** (*teleioos* or *teleioo*) **complete in Christ.** [Colossians 1:18]

Ultimately, there is a completeness that can happen right now and is happening right now but it is not absolute perfection.

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And then we have Scriptures that show us that when we are glorified, when we see Christ as He is, we will be practically made perfect. Hebrews 12:23.

“to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,” [Hebrews 12:23]

Made perfect. 1 John 3 shares this. Without the word *teleioos*, it shares this concept.

¹See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God (what a wonderful thing); and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. [1 John 3:1-3]

We are going to be perfect. We are going to be completely righteous. We are going to completely be purged of sin and glorified. That is what is going to happen, and if you have that true hope then you are going to want to live that way now. You are going to press forward towards that goal right now. And Paul says, “That is what I am doing but I have not made it yet.” “Not that I have already obtained it (back in Philippians 3) or have already obtained it (I have not been made perfect yet), but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” He is saying, “I press on, I pursue this goal of Christ-likeness, as we will see. I pursue the life of Christ being lived out in me as I am dead to myself. I pursue being like Christ through faith in order that I may lay hold (here is the reason) of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ.”

The term “lay hold” speaks of an intense form of *lambano*. Well, what does that mean? It speaks of grasping forcibly. It speaks of making one’s own. “That I may lay hold of what is going to truly happen to me, I press forward in this.” Folks, if we just grasped what this statement meant, it would revolutionize our Christian lives. Paul presses forward to lay hold of that for which also he was laid hold of by Christ. He is saying, “Christ laid hold of me for a purpose.” And that purpose, as we will see, is for us to be like Christ and what glorifies God? Christ’s likeness, ultimately. It is Christ that glorifies God. And when we are ultimately like Christ, we will bring God glory. That is the purpose. Folks, if we just grasped this. And it is because of so many false gospels that permeate the church these days that people do not know why Christ saves people. People do not know why they are saved. They do not know why God saves them. They think salvation is it. Why did Jesus Christ lay hold forcibly of the apostle Paul? To make him His own, that is what He did. Why did He do that? Obviously, in context, it is so that Paul would become like Christ. And this is what brings glory to God. Nothing other than the Spirit’s justifying and sanctifying work through the Word of God that makes us like Christ.

Folks, we are not saved so that we can have better marriages. We are not saved so that we can get out of our financial binds. We are not saved so that we can have some emotional, ecstatic experience of

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worship. We are saved, we are grasped, we are made His by Christ so that we would become like Christ. Paul presses on towards that. Ray Stedman writes,

The supreme purpose of the church of the church is not the evangelizing of the world. I know that is often held up to us as the supreme aim and purpose of the church. Certainly there is a great commission in the Bible and Jesus has sent us to preach the gospel to every creature. This is the most important thing, but it is not the supreme thing, not the final goal. Romans 8:29 speaks of God predestinating His own to be conformed to the image of his Son.

The ultimate end of all evangelism is conformation to the image of Jesus Christ. And Paul recognized that, and he pressed forward to that. That is what he focused on. It is pretty simple, isn't it? It is pretty plain. It is not too complex. We do not have to go through the bases of first through fourth (using the metaphor of baseball) to figure out what God's plan is for us in Scripture. And, folks, how my heart is grieved over this modern seeker-sensitive church movement that has polluted and diluted the Truth with their worldly ways, leaning on their own understanding. Rebellion towards God because they do not preach authoritatively His Word as exemplified by their unwillingness to share His Word. What a shame.

Paul pressed forward to the goal. He understood what the goal was. He understood why he was laid hold of by Christ. He understood that. And he reached forward to lay hold of that goal. That is God's plan for you and I right now, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. The goal that Paul pressed forward towards. And he was not there yet. He was not there yet. And we are not there yet. But he focused on it completely. And, folks, what God is doing through every circumstance in your life is using them to cause you to depend on Him and to trust in Him so that you will grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ through the Word, bringing conformity to His death and thus His resurrection i.e. ultimately manifesting the life of Christ.

Is this not what Paul says in Romans 8:28 and 29? We love 8:28 but we do not see it in context with Romans 8:29.

“²⁸And we know that God causes all things to work together for good (We know that everything that happens He is causing to work together for good. But the context is that this good is being conformed to the image of Christ, as we will see.) to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;” [Romans 8:28-29]

Conformed to the image of Christ, that is what God has predestined us to, that is the goal that Paul pressed forward towards. And that is what he knew he would eventually attain when he was glorified. He pressed forward towards the goal of completeness in Christ. Being like Christ, responding like Christ, yielding like Christ. Christ, although He was God, when He was in the flesh He kept entrusting Himself to the One who judges righteously. He did the Father's will. “Not My will but Thy will be done.”

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If you are saved, if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, repenting of your sin, trusting in Christ Jesus as Lord (not as Christ Jesus as some type of Santa Claus but Christ Jesus as Lord), He laid hold of you to make you like Him. And that is the goal. And every event in your life God is allowing and designed to do that. And that is why it is such a sin to grumble and complain about our circumstances. It militates against God's purpose in your life which is conforming you to the image of Christ.

Oh brother and sister, if the Word of God dwelled richly in us when difficulties came and we saw those as the avenue in which God is using to make us like Christ, how things would be changed. How things would be different. How we would be rejoicing rather than worrying. Thanking rather than complaining. Submitting rather than demanding. Trusting Christ rather than relying on ourselves.

So Paul pressed forward with single focus, we will see, towards the goal. Verse 13.

¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet (He says it again. He really wants them to really recognize the apostle Paul has not made it yet.); but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on (Same word; I pursue) toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." [Philippians 3:13-14]

Paul is repeating the same principle- he has not made it yet. Obviously, there is great danger in spiritual complacency- "Wow, God is really going to work in me and I am doing pretty good." Paul says, "I haven't made it yet. I am not there yet. I am not there yet." The process of becoming like Christ is a process that continues from our faith in Him and our day to day faith in Him until we see Him face to face and become like Him. And this is a warning to us. He says, "Brethren, I do not regard myself as laying hold of it yet. I am not there." Folks, I want to ask you, "How much spiritual accounting do you do?" Paul is doing all kinds of spiritual accounting here. He is reflecting on where he is at in his relationship with Jesus Christ in light of His Word. How much spiritual accounting do you do? Do you look at your life in light of Scripture and evaluate it? I am not talking about in light of other people; in light of Scripture. Folks, if we do this we see progress. But yet we should recognize that we are not there yet, right? We need to learn from the apostle Paul. If he had not laid hold of completeness yet, none of us have laid hold of it.

And in light of 1 John, we saw John 1:8, that no one is without sin until we are glorified, right? Now we see Paul single-mindedly pressed on towards the goal. Again, verse 13.

¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [Philippians 3:13-14]

Here he says, "but one thing I do." And there is no "I do" in the Greek. One thing. One thing. Single-minded focus on one thing. That is not a blind focus, as we will see. In doing that one thing he did two things- forgets what lies behind and presses forward. But it is basically one thing he does. Now, what is

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this one thing he does? He seems to mention three. Forgetting, reaching, and pressing on. I believe in the grammar, that what he is speaking of is pressing on. That is the one thing he does, and in that context he forgets what lies behind and he reaches forward towards the goal.

So with this one thing we see two distinct actions. What is the first distinct action we see that must happen if we are to reach forward to the goal? If we are to press forward and pursue Christ-likeness, this must happen and if it is not happening in your life you are not pressing forward. You are bogged down, you are looking back. He says, "One thing I do: forgetting what behind." Folks, you cannot run a race (it is just obvious) looking backwards. Simply put, you are going to lose. If you are not pressed towards the goal, you are going to lose the race. And many of you look back. And you are losing right now because you are looking back. You are behind. Paul had reason to be in counseling for years. He had persecuted the church, he was the chief of sinners. He could have looked back all of the time in what he did. But he says, "One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind." It is behind there.

Well, what is it that he was forgetting here specifically? It speaks of a continual action of forgetting. Continually choosing to forget what lies behind. I am making a choice not to be focused on that. I am making the choice to not focus on it. Well, what is "it"? What are these things that lie behind us? Well, certainly there is our life before Christ. That lies behind us, right? Certainly the wickedness that we did that we do feel guilty and shameful over, rightfully so. But he says, "I forget it." If we do not forget it we are not going to be single-minded and we are going to get tripped up. Certainly we should forget our past failures. They have been forgiven, right? Jesus puts our sins as far as the east is from the west. We do not do that. We put them as far as the other room. We should forget them. Paul was not perfect. I am sure he failed. He says, "One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind." He says, "I have not made it yet", right?

And folks, something that you may not think about- we need to forget our past successes in Christ also. Yes, we have memorial stones that we give God glory for but that glory quickly moves to us and our pride. If we look back and continually remember those things we will not press forward. They will be a hindrance. And folks, you have seen it and I have seen it- people who talk about the glory days of Christ at that church, when God did this movement or that movement. And all they are thinking about is what God did in the past. We praise Him for it, we rejoice in it but we forget what lies behind and we press forward towards the goal. One thing: forgetting what lies behind.

And then he says, "and reaching forward to what lies ahead." This image, again, is of the race. It is stretching forward to the finish line, it is grasping the tape that goes across the line. He is reaching forward to it. He is focused on it. He is forgetting what he has already done in the race. You know, the Lord has put us into a race. We are to run it with endurance, the race that is put before us. But we are not to be looking back. We are to be pressing on, understanding clearly what the goal of our salvation is. It is to be like Christ. Complete in Christ so that He would be glorified for all eternity. Continually reaching ahead. What lies ahead? It is the upward call, right? That is what lies ahead. The upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It is what He has called us for, as we will see. Paul understood what he was pressing toward- this upward call. Verse 14, he says, "I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call

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of God in Christ Jesus.” The goal is the upward call, the prize is the upward call in Christ Jesus. He is pressing forward continually towards this. That is what he is pressing forward to. That is what his goals are. His goals are not to have a house or a running well. His goals are not all the things we focus on. Certainly God will bring those things about that He wants us to do, but if we are focused on Christ, He will do that.

But what is the upward call? It is God’s calling of men unto Himself for salvation. To be brought from darkness to light, to be made into the image of Christ. 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 10. He is talking about “Satan prowls about like a roaring lion, be sober in spirit, resist him firm in your faith (faith in Jesus), knowing that others are suffering also. This is God’s plan, nothing is out of order, this is what He is doing.” And then he says, ¹⁰ **And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you (in the past) to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.” [1 Peter 5:10]**

When you were saved, God called you unto Himself to His eternal glory. It is so much more than it is shared at times these days in our shallow gospel. If you have come to Jesus Christ, you have been called to His eternal glory- that is where you are going and that is where He is taking us right now. And He is using everything in our lives to conform us to the image of Christ on the way. John MacArthur writes,

“What’s the goal? What did we say the goal was? To be what? Like Christ. What’s the prize? To be made like Christ. That’s why he says: “You bear down on the prize which is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” What’s going to happen when that upward call comes? You’re going to be like what? Like Christ. The goal is the prize, the prize is the goal. So Paul says, “Look, the goal of my life is to be like Christ and that’s also the reward of my race.” You say, “You’re going to reach that goal in this life?” No, but it’s still the goal...it’s still the goal. But some day I will be like Christ, that’s the prize that God gives to the one who runs the race. The goal is to be like Christ, perfection in Christ. The prize is to be like Christ, perfection in Christ. Someday we’ll be like Him for we shall see Him as He is, as 1 John 3 says.”

That is the goal. Paul pressed on to the grand, wonderful prize of becoming like Christ. We agonize over how we are not like Christ, do we not? We agonize over our failings, we agonize over our attitudes, we agonize over those things that are not Christ-like. That is not where we are going. And God is using everything in our lives to bring about our lives to conformity of Christ. Romans 8:28-29. He is taking our trials and testing, producing endurance and endurance’s perfect result that we would be complete and lacking in nothing. James 1. Every circumstance- work, schooling your kids, homeschooling, family, trials, everything. What God is doing is using difficulties to cause you to depend upon Christ so His Word will be manifest in you and you will grow closer to Him and respond by faith in a way that brings Him glory. Paul pressed forward to this goal, the one thing. I want to ask you, “Is your focus on one thing?” Everything revolves around it. When something comes in your life, it catches you off guard, the fiery trial, do you see it in the context of one thing- “God is going to use this to make me like Christ, that is what I see.” That is the way we have to look at it if you are a believer. That is an eternal mindset, that is

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a Christian mindset. Paul says, "One thing." And if we could only grasp this, one thing. Wasn't that what Jesus was trying to teach Martha? Luke 10:38.

³⁸ Now as they were traveling along, (speaking of Jesus) He entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord's word, seated at His feet. (listening to Jesus, at His feet) ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him, and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." (You know, we have that attitude in life a lot with certain things, don't we? Rather than just focusing on Christ, we start to demand others around us to help us in our burdens.) ⁴¹ But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; ⁴² but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." [Luke 10:38-41]

She was listening to His Word at His feet. And, folks, one thing we press forward to, is Christ-likeness. And it is intricately connected to the knowledge of Christ, a relationship with Him as we saw earlier. The surpassing value of knowing Christ and thus becoming like Him. One thing. And at this point, Paul gives us all an exhortation to do the same thing. Verse 15. **"Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained." [Philippians 3:15-16]**

He says, "Let us therefore". Therefore, because of his testimony of how he presses forward toward the goal, the upward prize, one thing he does, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward. Therefore let us, as many as are perfect (That word he is using here, I believe, is speaking of maturity, or mature), do the same, have this attitude, think this way, the exact same phrase we saw back in chapter two where he said, "Have this attitude which was in Christ Jesus" or literally is "phroneo"- think this way. Think this way. That is the exhortation to you today, think this way. One thing. And that one thing does not have anything to do with you. It has to do with Christ. One thing. Think this way. If you are mature, think this way. Be single-minded towards the goal alone. And then he addresses those who are not mature, babes in Christ. Those who are not understanding. And if in anything you have a different mindset (or attitude), God will reveal this to you also. How does God reveal things to us? Is it through, "I am just walking along and all of a sudden I look in the tree and there is a note saying, 'Oh, one thing!'" No, God reveals it through the Word of God, and he is saying, "If you do not understand, God is going to reveal it to you; it is part of the plan- you are going to understand. It is going to happen. God will reveal this to you. If you do not understand what I am saying, as you study the Word of God, as you grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, you will understand this. God will reveal this to you because this is His plan."

Today the Word of God revealed to us how we should be thinking, right? As believers? Forgetting what lies behind, pressing forward. Folks, if you have got a whole truckload of baggage lying behind you, just confess it. It did not leave Paul's mind; he said, "I persecuted the church." He understood, he knew

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about it. But he chose not to focus on it. He did not spend his thoughts thinking about the things in the past. He pressed forward towards the goal.

And now we have a warning for everyone, young and old, mature and immature in terms of Christ. Verse 16. ¹⁶**however**, (just because God is going to reveal it to you and you do not totally understand it now, there is no excuse here to live in a way that does not glorify God. However.) **let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. [Philippians 3:16]** As you grow in Christ you obtain a standard of understanding and knowledge in your relationship with Christ and you do not go back. You do not go back when you learn the truths about Christ. You grow at that point. And he says, "However do not go back." Keep living at the standard that you have obtained as you come to an understanding of Christ and His Word. Keep living by that standard, do not back up. Do not slide back to the way you used to be. And folks, if you are not in the Word of God you will be conformed to the world, you will slide back. We need to be renewed and have these truths flowing through our minds. When the trials come, we need to go to Philippians 3 and say, "One thing! Ok, this is what I need to be thinking. This is what aligns up with my trial right now. Not what I am feeling, but what God says." We have seen the testimony of the apostle Paul. He was self-focused and self-reliant before Christ. He saw all of that as loss. It was a religious self-focus and a religious self-reliance. But he saw all of it as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ. And then he says he actually lost it all. And he counted it but dung, that he might gain Christ. And he did gain Christ and he found a righteousness not of his own but a righteousness by faith in Christ. And we see Paul's greatest desire after truly coming to faith was to know Jesus Christ, to understand the power of his resurrection and the sufferings, the fellowship of the sufferings, being conformed to His death that His life may be manifested.

And we see from that he had a single focus on being Christ-like. I want to ask you, "What hindrances and things are in the way of you single-mindedly being focused on what Christ does?" I'm not saying we become monks and go hide away and have a single focus. But we recognize in everything God has called you to do, in families, relationships, school, whatever it is; those things that happen are designed by Him to conform us to the image of Christ. One thing. Do you see it that way? If not, just tell the Lord you are sorry or if you just learned it today praise God. Maybe today some of you are not saved and you are hearing His call right now to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Do not reject or disobey the command that comes from God, that repentance for the forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed throughout the entire earth. Jesus cried out, "Believe!" Trust in Christ. All of your stuff is worthless, believe that He paid the price, cry out to Him to save you from your sin.

And folks, for us believers (as I have shared), the point of the passage is clear. Press on, pursue Christ-likeness, pursue it in every avenue, every facet of your life. Pursue Christ-likeness. That is where we are going, that is what He has ordained for us. Pursue it right now, that is what He has called us to. One last caveat- Paul is not telling us to pursue that in our own strength. In context of Scripture, we pursue that by faith in Jesus Christ. We believe what He said, and we trust Him. And that produces an obedient heart and an obedient life. What are your goals? Are you pressing forward? Have you attained certain standards as you have walked with Christ? Do not slip back, keep pressing forward. You have not made

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it yet but keep pressing forward. When you learn more truth, do not go backwards. Go forwards. Reach forwards. Forget what lies behind and press forward to this upward, wonderful call in Christ.

Prayer

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Paul who, by Your grace, understood this truth. And by Your mercy has revealed it to us. Thank You so much, Lord God. Father, You have predestined us to be conformed to the image of Your Son. Our plan is to be made perfect. That is your plan for us, to be glorified, to be with You, to be like You. Father, help us to see every event in our lives as designed and ordained by You to keep us focused on the one thing. Father, I pray that we would run the race with endurance, that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter, completer, of our faith. We pray for that, Lord God. And may we as a body exhibit a single focus and mindset, not on buildings and stuff, Lord God, but on becoming like Your Son. We pray this now in Jesus' Name.

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