

Philippians 3:12—4:1

Stand Firm but Press On!

What does Paul mean by “not already obtained all this”? All what? See 3:10 He is not there yet—his relationship with Christ is not yet complete, not perfect. He recognizes that he doesn't “know Christ” the way he wants to. He has not already grasped the intimate knowledge of His Savior that he seeks. The spiritual giant Paul is still engaged in the struggle of living the daily Christian life (Romans 7:15-20).

The word “perfect,” as the Bible uses it of men, does not refer to sinless perfection. Although a number of Hebrew and Greek words are translated “perfect,” the thought is usually either completeness in all details *tamam* (Hebrew) or *katartizo* (Greek) or reaching a goal or achieving a purpose. Christians do not attain sinlessness in this life.

Since Paul has “not already obtained all this,” what is his strategy (v. 12)? Press on! Paul recognizes his responsibility of pursuing greater personal, experiential knowledge of, intimacy with, and conformity to Christ—and holiness. We too have a responsibility in our own journeys. God saved us so that we could enjoy fellowship with Christ (John 15; 1 John 1:1-3). Practical sanctification does not come automatically by faith as does justification and glorification. We must diligently and intentionally pursue it—by following the Lord.

Paul talks about Christ Jesus taking hold of him. When did that happen—and why? On the Damascus road. Paul's dramatic transformation began with a clear encounter with Jesus Christ. He tasked Paul with service: 1) as the apostle to the Gentiles, 2) spreading the gospel, 3) planting churches—all while transforming him into the likeness of Christ.

***Application:* Do you remember when God grabbed ahold of your heart and lifted the scales from your eyes?**

Since God has also taken hold of us, what might be some of God's purposes in taking hold of you? Direct you to ministry in the military (your mission field), give you a leadership role like Paul, conform you to Christ's image, etc.

Paul repeats his strategy (v. 13-14). Press on! He did not look back. Paul does not mean that he refuses to remember things of his past, but rather that he does not rest in his heritage (see v. 5-7) or past attainments (see v. 9-12). He has abandoned the unworthy goals of the past and is in pursuit of new ones in becoming more like Christ. He didn't make excuses, never said, “I'm just human” or “we all make mistakes.”

What are the consequences of living in the past? Memory of wrongdoing (e.g. Paul's persecution of the church, see 3:6) could paralyze us with guilt and despair, while remembering only the good things could make us complacent or apathetic.

Like Paul we need to forget. Why do we sometimes have trouble forgetting? Memories can be a consequence of sin—and Satan loves bringing up our past. However, not totally forgetting can serve as a deterrent from ever going back.

God expects us to “press on” just like Paul. What does that mean? Our Christian life is not just about getting to heaven. It's all about the journey: perseverance, intentionality in how we lead our lives—no apathy or giving up. As Paul, we should have one clearly defined goal: getting to know Christ better and better.

What are some “press on” examples in our lives? Working out our salvation with fear and trembling. Marriage, separation, deployment. We need Paul's attitude of perseverance and intentionality in leading our lives/families.

Paul's ambition is to “press on toward the goal to win the prize.” What goal? What prize? Paul's goal was complete knowledge of Christ (3:10); living on earth and getting to know the Lord as well as possible before entering His presence and seeing Him face to face (1 John 3:2-3). The prize—eternity with the Master! The prize would be attained by Paul after reaching the goal at the end of his race, but not before then.

What was Paul's point of, “And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you” (v. 15)? He's saying that if their minds are set on any other goal or thing in life, God would reveal that to them by

conviction through the Holy Spirit. It is comforting to know: when we get off track, God will point it out to us so we can get back on track.

What is Paul's exhortation in v. 16? Walk as a Christian—live “a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Eph. 4:1).

Paul then says, “follow my example.” Isn't that egotistical (v. 17)? While Paul's advice appears egocentric to some, his encouragement is about following Christ and His truth—which he was following—in contrast to following the Judaizers and their false teachings.

Who are the “enemies of the cross of Christ” and what are their characteristics (v. 18)? Anyone who hinders the spread of the gospel. Anyone who lives their life in direct contrast to the lives of discipline and sacrifice that followers of Christ endure. That person is an enemy of the cross of Christ.

Specifically in this case the antinomians posed a threat to the joy and spiritual development of the Philippians. These idolaters advocated lawless living: 1) Free rein satisfying their sexual appetites (if it feels good, do it); 2) Pleasure and pride in things that should cause shame; and 3) Pursuing physical and material things, fully absorbed with the present enjoyment of life to the utter exclusion of spiritual matters. Which was the extreme opposite of what the Judaizers were teaching.

What is the reason we should not follow the lifestyle of sensualists (v. 20)? As Christians we have a dual citizenship—we live on earth but heaven is our true home. Far more important than our brief earthly sojourn is our heavenly citizenship and destiny—but we have a responsibility to live as foreigners and pilgrims while here.

Applications: Do you ever think of yourself as a foreigner? Do you eagerly await the return of Christ? If so what are some things that should characterize your lives? Courage, joy, excitement, etc.

What is the bright future which awaits all citizens of heaven (v. 21)? We will be transformed into Christ's likeness—our lowly bodies will one day look like His glorified body.

Since this is our glorious future, it should have some profound implications for the present. We are on a journey to our eternal homeland where we will receive our eternal bodies. In that day there will no longer be any temptations to overcome, no trials to endure, no sins to defeat, etc. Then “time will be no more.” What we have done with our lives on this earth will be set in eternal cement as a monument—to God's glory or our foolishness.

“Therefore” refers back to what (v. 4:1)? Because of the promise that we will be transformed to be like Jesus (Philippians 3:21). All the more the reason to stand firm in the Lord

An interesting paradox is presented here—we can only “stand firm in the Lord” by “pressing on” to become more like Him. Christians not moving forward are really falling backward whether they realize it or not. It's impossible to stand still in the Lord.

Note the deep affection Paul has for these believers— he calls them his “joy,” loving and longing for them. No wonder they loved and responded to him as well. The man of God's heart ought to find his joy from two primary sources—Christ and people. One of the marks of spiritual maturity is that we rejoice in the same things God rejoices in.

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