

Phil Ch 3 Vs 12-16

Pressing on

A runner having set a mile record when he was 18 yrs old, talked about his training: “I would run until I felt I couldn’t take another step; then I would run until I felt my lungs were going to burst. When I came to that state, then I would run until I thought I was going to pass out. When I did this, I was making progress.” Paul, in this next portion of scripture paints the picture of an athlete on the home stretch, pressing toward the goal, not giving in, not letting up because he feels he’s about there, but rather pressing on, running with endurance the race that’s set before him. Allowing the goal, not to ease his stride, (thinking, man I’ve almost arrived I can breathe easy) but rather to re-inspire him to press harder than he ever has that he might win the race. In essence it seems as though textually he takes us from the positional to the practical. From the complete positional righteousness that we have in Christ (relating back to vs 9) to the practical working out of that righteousness in his life, God working in us 1st that He might work through us, causing His righteousness to become a practical working reality in our lives.

It seems as though vs 12-16 are sort of squeezed in there sort of like information between 2 parenthesis. Vs1-11 forming one parenthesis, and Vs17-21 forming the other, and this information in between is for clarification purposes. Because Paul has just stated some pretty radical things about righteousness and what true righteousness is vs what it isn’t. and One thing that it isn’t, is to trust in self-effort to obtain favor before God. and Paul emphatically refutes that mentality in the 1st 8 vs of ch 3. Because he’d been there and done that, he had sought to obtain divine favor in and through the means of his own self-effort, the thing that he did, and the things that he didn’t do.

You have to understand the mentality of where these guys were coming from, they believed that in keeping the law they attained to perfection, complete holiness, lacking nothing. and Paul is in essence blasting buck shot through that bucket of theology, because it just doesn’t hold water. and He points out that true righteousness, doesn’t come from anything that I do, or anything that I don’t do. It comes from what Jesus has already done on the cross. and Being found in Him (as he says in vs 9) not having my own righteousness, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. and He’s pointing out the fact that this is where true righteousness is found before God, being robbed or wrapped up in Christ seen by God through Him. That’s how we gain God’s favor, that’s how we get to know Him, that’s how we’re seen as righteous in His eyes. and It all kind of ties together when you get to vs 17 and he says, “*Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*”

Note those who *look to* Christ, who *lean on* Christ and *trust in* Christ for their every need, and follow *their* example as it pertains to attaining righteousness, as opposed to these legalizers who are trying to bring you under the bondage legalism, which in reality does nothing for you anyway except deceive you and give you a false sense of assurance and righteousness. But in between these two statements he sandwiches vs12-16 so that we don't miss-understand what it is that he's trying to say. Because we could very easily draw the conclusion that since there are no works that we can do that gain us righteousness, or perfection, but by believing on Christ we're seen as righteous before God, then in Christ must be where we *really* attain, that's where we're perfected. Once we're in Christ, now we're perfect, the perfection we were seeking through the law is in reality found in Christ. and While *positionally* that may be true, Paul now points out that *practically* we all have a long way to go, and that physical perfection is never attained this side of eternity.

Those who use their position *in* Christ to alleviate their practice *on* earth are those who abuse the grace God. What I mean by that is to say, "well, if in Christ I'm seen as perfect, or God sees me as having attained, then it doesn't matter what I do in this mortal shell of a body, because I'm perfect in Christ." and So I do what I want and become an abuser of God's grace, using the grace of God as a cloak for vice; something which the bible expressly forbids. Peter said, "*For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.*" In other words use the liberty you have in Christ as a means to serve God, not to see how much you can sin and still have salvation. I would have to question the heart of the individual who had that mentality, the bible says that you're not your own anymore (if you are in Christ) because you were bought at a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

So Paul acknowledges that the only righteousness that profits a man is that which is through Christ by faith. But the working out of that righteousness in our lives takes a lifetime, in other words though God imputes righteousness to you immediately upon your receiving Christ, it's worked out through you in practical means over the course of your whole life as you grow and develop and mature in His grace. God plants it in you and then it establishes roots and begins to bud forth through you, you don't start walking on air the moment you receive Christ. Notice vs 12.

Vs12-16

So even though Paul has taught concerning what it means to be found as righteous before God, he still emphasizes that though I began my pursuit of God some 30 yrs ago when He laid hold of my life on the Damascus road, I'm still pursuing Him today. I still haven't grasped the fullness of the reality of what it means to walk in the resurrection power of the Spirit. (Relating us back to vs 10-11) He says, "not that I have already attained" or "arrived" or am perfected, he's saying that even though his position in Christ is perfect, that his practice on this earth is far from perfect. In vs 11 he states that his desire is to attain (in regards to the resurrection) but in vs 12 he acknowledges that he's not there.

He equates here, or associates (connects) practical perfection to the resurrection. In vs 11 he says, “*if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*” and Then here in vs 12 he says I haven’t attained it, nor am I perfected, associating perfection with the resurrection, when this body of sin is done away with and I no longer have the struggles or temptations that go along with being in this body. That’s when we will be truly perfect, in 1 John 3:2 John writes and says, “*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*”

In other words when you attain to the resurrection from the dead, you will be perfect even as Christ Himself is perfect, in other words, you will be sinless. But right now you’re not, it amazes me how many people believe they are, how many people believe that they’ve attained or arrived at perfection. and Now they’re ready for the likes of you and me to come and sit at their feet and be instructed in the ways of perfection, because they’ve arrived. They’ve grown content in their walks, believing that they can grow no more; and yet we see where Paul was never satisfied where he was at in His walk with the Lord. (I feel sorry for people who are satisfied with where they’re at) Paul knew that there was always more, he knew that he’d not even come close to plumbing the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. Therefore he pressed on; he “followed after” as your bible might say, it’s the idea of the pursuit of God. The word that’s been translated as “press” or “follow after” is the word that was used many times in reference to pursuing prey in a hunt, you’re following after this animal, tracking it, pursuing it, that you might lay hold of it.

Paul was saying that I’m pursuing God, I’m tracking Him, seeking to walk in His steps that I might meet His desired end for my life. I’m not perfect yet, but that’s not going to stop me from pursuing perfection, from pursuing the reality of living 100% in the resurrection power of the Spirit of God whereby sin has no rule over my life. and Even though this tent will limit me in my complete achievement of that (not positionally but practically) I’m still going to pursue it, and press towards it, why, that I might lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. How many of us, (I wonder) pursue, follow after, and press towards practical perfection? Not to be deceived knowing that our arrival at that point won’t happen until the resurrection, but we follow hard after it, because we’ve caught the vision that Paul caught and that’s that God has a plan for my life, God has a plan for your life. There is a reason that He laid hold of your life and I don’t know about you but as for me I want to lay hold of that, for which He has laid hold of me.

So what do I do? I seek to eliminate (by His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit in my life) those things in my life that hinder that plan. Laying aside (as Hebrews tells us) every weight, and the sin, which so easily ensnares us that we might run with endurance and meet that end that He desires of us. Which ultimately as I see it is at least 2-fold, when God laid hold of your life, He had at least 2 things in mind for your life. #1 That you might share with Him the eternal glories of His kingdom, being a joint heir with Christ Rev 21:7 “*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*”

Now none of us have apprehended that, our being here bearing witness to that fact. But meanwhile His plan for you is that you might be His witness until He comes for us. What was the last that Jesus said before ascending to heaven from the Mt of olives? Acts 1:8, He said, “*you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me.*” His will for you is that you would be an accurate and effective witness for Him, of Him to the world around you. Now ultimately the only way to be 100% accurate in your witness of Him is to be perfect yourself. Something which won’t happen, but as Paul said, that won’t stop me from pursuing it, or pressing towards it, because I want to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. I don’t want to stand before my Lord as that wicked and lazy servant, being chastised, punished and rebuked, but rather as one who hears well-done good and faithful servant, enter in to the joy of your Lord. and So I press toward that mark.

Vs13

So he reaffirms to them that he’s not being some self-righteous pompous individual in his estimation of obtaining righteousness, he says practically speaking I’m not there. But, one thing I do, do me a favor, highlight, or underline, maybe circle that word “one.” Because that word is a key that unlocks the door, or solves the riddle of stagnation, condemnation, or complacency, all of those things evaporate, dissipate and dissolve at the application of this one truth. Paul says, “one thing I do,” which to me speaks of focus, it speaks of singleness of heart and mind, it speaks of concentration. So many times in our pursuit of godliness we have our lists of 27 steps to holiness we start off our day with prayer, get into the word, and we all may have our own little ritual that we feel we have to get through that if we don’t the whole thing is blown. We wake up and are in a hurry and we get out the door, we haven’t read, we haven’t prayed, we haven’t fasted in 2 weeks or 2 months or 2 years or, ever. and So we think oh!! Man the whole thing is a wash I can’t be holy today I forgot to read my bible. But we never find in God’s word where God encourages us to get our irons in 15 different fires, He keeps it simple, He focuses on 1 thing at a time. Jesus told the rich young ruler, “**1** thing you lack.”

Now had He wanted to He could’ve stood there all day pointing out that young mans flaws, but He concentrated on one thing, and until that was dealt with there was no need to go any farther. In Luke Ch 10 when Martha was running around all crazy because she was busy serving and she began to criticize Mary for resting at the feet of Jesus, Jesus put a stop to her criticism and told her that *one* thing was needed and Mary had chosen that better part. In John ch 9 after healing a blind man, the man was cross-examined and he got to the point where he said, *one thing* I know, that though I was blind now I see. The psalmist cried out in Ps 27 *one thing* have desired of the Lord, that will I seek after.

Here as Paul is sort of setting the precursor to his illustration of an athlete running his course, he says one thing I do. You see it's about concentrating on one thing at a time, no athlete succeeds by trying to do everything, they may be proficient in several different arenas, but they specialize in *one thing*. They concentrate their efforts and they keep their eyes on the prize, on the goal for which they're aiming to hit and they're devoted and dedicated entirely to that call. Which promotes stability, their not given to distracting invitations no matter how attractive they may be. They understand the importance of staying their course. James tells us that it's the double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways. He thinks well maybe I should be doing this, or maybe I should be doing this, or going there or trying that, and he's always vacillating back and forth. Because he lacks stamina, he's not single minded and focused, being faithful to his call. and In that error there is frustration, there is the absence of joy, there can be condemnation which leads to complacency, you just give up. Paul is saying I stay focused, I stick to one thing, which is to forget that which is behind me and reach forward to that which is ahead. He leaves the things which are in the past, in the past, he forgets them.

Now understand that when we read of forgetting in the bible that we're not speaking of somehow causing them to magically disappear in our minds so that we fail to remember them. Unless you have some sort of brain malfunction that affects your memory, no mature individual forgets the issues of their past. When the bible speaks of forgetting, it speaks of no longer being influenced by or affected by our past. When God says, "*Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.*" He isn't suggesting that He'll conveniently have a bad memory, because that would be impossible for God. What He's saying is that He'll no longer hold their sins against them and that their sins can no longer affect their standing with Me or influence My attitude toward them. So when Paul says, I forget those things which are behind me, he's saying, "I'm no longer allowing those things to influence me, or affect my direction for the future." So many people are condemned, paralyzed, and sterilized by their past. and Believe me Paul could've been such a man, we read of all the things he did and wrote and wonder if the man ever sinned when in fact he says of himself that he was the chief of sinners, not even worthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God.

If there was ever some baggage that could've been used to really beat him up with that was it. He was a blasphemer, a murderer and His only target was the church. Now a lot of people have done a lot of things and they get caught in the defeatist trap because they're beat up and condemned over their past. The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul says forget it, if anyone be in Christ they're a new creation, old things pass away behold all things are made new. Don't allow those things to influence your present situation or your future work, they're in the past and they need to stay there, it doesn't matter if it was yesterday or last week or last year or 10 yrs ago.

If you're in Christ, they're gone, if you blew it in Christ and have confessed it, it's forgiven and you are clean, now move on. Reach for those things which are ahead. Now I also need to state that some people get apathetic due to their past successes rather than failures. They've achieved some milestone victory or something and having had such a great accomplishment they rest on it. When God would have you keep going, there's more still to do. So be it failure, or be it success, don't be influenced by those things today, you're to live in the here and now, not in the past, but in the present, and reaching for, or pressing towards those things to come.

Vs14 (Paul says)

Notice these words that Paul is using, "I press," "lay hold," "reaching forward," "I press toward the goal" and here we have that athletic picture of the Olympic runner pressing toward the finish line. Arms reaching forward, chest pressed out, neck outstretched giving it all he's got to reach that goal, again it's that pursuit, that psalmist wrote, "*as the deer panteth for the water so my soul longeth after Thee.*" It's that pursuit we were talking about earlier, we often picture a gentle sunrise with dew kissing the grass and a deer with her fawns out just sort of drinking in the fresh water.

That's not the picture the psalmist was going for at all. He was coming from the perspective of the hunt, and the hunters are on horseback and they're pursuing the deer and it's running for it's life and the hunt has been long and hard and here's this deer and it's panting for it's life and it's about to die of thirst. and As that deer is longing for the water lest he die, so to the psalmist said, that's how my soul is longing after You. God my life depends on it, my soul is panting, thirsting after You, and unless I am refreshed in the fountain of living waters I'm going to die. This is sort of the picture Paul is painting, he's saying, "*I press toward the goal.*" Those things that we acting as shackles holding me back are now acting like spurs goading me on, pushing me and prodding me on toward the goal. This word "press" has in it the inflection or the understanding of determination. Casting everything else aside focusing on the goal and running with endurance the race that's set before us.

1 Cor 9:24 Paul says there, "*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.*" and Again, Heb 12:1-2 "*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*(and often times runners will tell you that when they're running chaos could be happening around them and they'd never know it because they know that to go the distance they have to have a focal point. and They'll pick a point, look unto that point and run toward that mark, and the writer of Hebrews says for us) *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.*" (Read vs14) and Having placed his hands to that plow he's not looking back.

Now remember that the prize isn't salvation, salvation is a gift, we don't run for salvation, you don't run a race representing a certain country unless you're already a citizen of that country. But even as when you win that race you are rewarded accordingly, Paul is saying the same thing here, when you finish this race you'll have an incorruptible crown and eternal glory as opposed to temporary recognition and the accolades of man. "The prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." and

Believe me you want to partake in the prize of that upward call, you don't want to become disqualified because you didn't participate according to the rules. When we are taken up in glory, when God gives us that upward call, you don't want to miss it. and You won't as long as the goal that you're pressing towards is in Christ Jesus. Notice that's where the prize is found, it's only in Christ Jesus, you abide in Christ and you'll be alright, step out of the safety zone and you'll be disqualified. So as God gives us that upward call being in Christ Jesus, when you stand before the bema seat of Christ you'll be rewarded for your race. and The things that were motivated by God, will be precious jewels, and those things that were of the flesh will burn like wood, hay, and stubble.

Vs15

Now it's interesting to me that the word that's been translated as "perfect" in vs 12, is the same word that's been translated as "mature" here, the context setting the difference. Part of being mature is realizing that you aren't perfect (practically speaking). But as many as are pressing toward that mark, who have your eyes on the goal, the cross of Jesus Christ and a resurrected Savior, have this mind. The mindset that forgets that which is behind, be it good or bad, so that they're future endeavors in Christ aren't influenced in a negative fashion, so that we might press with all that's with in us towards the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. and He says if anybody thinks differently, then you're simply showing your own immaturity, but if you're willing to be instructed by God, if we maintain teachable spirits, then God will reveal this reality to you.

Vs16

The call to unity, live with in the reality of what God has shown you, don't violate what you know to be true and His desire for your life. Part of which is that we would walk by the same rule, and be of the same mind, that being the mind of Christ.

You can't have the mind of Christ with out 1st knowing Christ, and if you're here this morning and you've never made a decision to allow Jesus Christ into your heart, wiping away all the guilt and shame of your past, making all things new, making you white as snow in His sight by the blood of His Son, I'd invite you to make that decision this morning. Because God has a plan for your life, and He wants to share with you the eternal riches and glory of His Kingdom. But that upward call is only in Christ Jesus.