

“Onward and Upward”

Philippians 3:12-14

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In our look at Philippians 3, Paul will show us how to keep moving forward towards the goal or peak of the Christian life. That day when we stand perfect and complete in Christ before the Father!

Onward

Philippians 3:12-13 ¹² Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but **I press on**, that I may lay hold of **that** for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but **one thing I do**, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...”

1. *By recognizing that God's not done with you.*

○ *“Not that I have already attained or am already perfected.”*

▪ *What a statement!*

▪ *But what was Paul talking about?*

- **Philippians 3:2-11** ² Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and **have no confidence in the flesh**, ⁴ though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

- Paul was saying, “If anyone has the right to brag about their own righteousness, it would be ME!”
 - “HOWEVER,” Paul could say, “We have NO right to brag about our own righteousness!”
 - Fact – Our ability to stand before God with our own righteousness is impossible.
 - Fact – Right standing before God ONLY comes through Christ.
- So, Paul says, “I have already attained, or am already perfected.”
- You cannot, I say, you CANNOT be made perfect in the flesh by keeping the law!
 - **Romans 8:3-4** ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

“A sanctified dissatisfaction is essential to progress in the Christian race.” Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 88). Victor Books.

- *Attained* –
 - Or obtained.
- *Apprehended* – to lay hold of or to seize.
 - Paul didn’t view himself as racing against others, but against himself. And he didn’t compare himself with others but compared himself against himself and Jesus.
 - Instead of measuring your spiritual success against others, you should measure yourself against Jesus.
 - Are you closer to Jesus now? Or were you closer in years past? Only you can answer that.

2. By recognizing God has a plan.

- *Lay hold of that for which* –
 - **Romans 11:36** “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”
 - **Ephesians 2:10** “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”
 - **Colossians 1:16** “All things were created through Him and for Him.”
 - **1 Peter 2:9** “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

3. *By being single-minded.*

- *One thing* – single-minded, whole-hearted devotion to the race!
 - *The unsaved person is consumed with the past, while the saved should be concerned with the future.*

“He says, “I do one thing,” as if he had given up all else, and addicted himself to one sole object—to aim to be like Jesus Christ.” – Spurgeon

- **Luke 10:38-42** ³⁸ Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.” ⁴¹ And Jesus answered and said to her, “**Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴² But *one thing* is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.**”
 - Martha was distracted with much serving.
 - She could not focus on Jesus and what she had deemed important.
 - Or perhaps she was too focused on what she was doing and what Mary wasn’t.
 - Mary was focused on what was important in the moment.
 - Sitting at the feet of Jesus!
 - **Psalm 27:4** “*One thing* I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple.”
 - What ONE THING do you desire above all else?
 - Is it to be with Jesus?

4. *By Forgetting the Past!*

- Forget what you did, good or bad.
 - Especially the bad!
 - Can we really forget?
 - NO! But we can live in such a way that we are no longer controlled by it.
 - Satan LOVES to remind you of your sinful past and hopefully cripple you.
 - I’ve heard it said that when he reminds us of our past, we should remind him of his future.

- **Luke 9:57-62** ⁵⁷ Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." ⁵⁹ Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." ⁶¹ And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." ⁶² But Jesus said to him, "*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*"
 - When we come to Christ, we must put the past life of sin behind us!
 - We must not look back and dwell on anything in the past.
- **Matthew 6:19-24** ¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness! ²⁴ "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."
 - *Lay up* – to gather and lay up, to heap up, store up: to accumulate riches,
 - *Treasure* – the place in which goods and precious things are collected and laid up.
 - *Good* – The word means single.
 - Hold out one finger and focus on it, easy, huh?
 - *Bad* – The word means many.
 - Can you focus on two things at once?
 - If my focus is first on God, my life will be filled with light.
 - If I am my focus, my life will be filled with darkness, and how great will that darkness be.
- You can't win a race looking behind; you MUST look at the goal!

*“We cannot change the past,
but we can change the meaning of the past.”*

Warren Weirsbe

5. *By reaching forward*

- *“I press on”*
 - *Reach Forward “Onward”* – to stretch as in a race.

“It is important to note that Paul is not telling us how to be saved. If he were, it would be a picture of salvation by works or self-effort, and this would contradict what he wrote in the first eleven verses of Philippians 3. In order to participate in the Greek games, the athlete had to be a citizen. He did not run the race to gain his citizenship. In Philippians 3:20, Paul reminds us that “our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven.” Because we are already the children of God through faith in Christ, we have the responsibility of “running the race” and achieving the goals God has set for us.” Wiersbe

UPward

Philippians 3:14 *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the **upward** call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

1. *Upward by pressing toward the goal!*

1. *I press toward* – I follow after

- The Greeks used it to describe a hunter eagerly pursuing his prey.
- *“There are two extremes to avoid here: (1) “I must do it all” and (2) “God must do it all!” The first describes the activist, the second the quietist, and both are heading for failure. “Let go and let God!” is a clever slogan, but it does not fully describe the process of Christian living. What quarterback would say to his team, “OK, men, just let go and let the coach do it all!” On the other hand, no quarterback would say, “Listen to me and forget what the coach says!” Both extremes are wrong.”* Wiersbe
 - **John 15:5** *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”*

- **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** ²⁴ 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*. ²⁵ And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*. ²⁶ Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

2. Upward by remaining disciplined.

- a. **Matthew 16:24-26** ²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

- i. *Deny himself* – In every moment of life to say no to self and yes to God. Barclay says to dethrone self, and enthrone God.
- ii. *Take up his cross* – The Christian life is a life of sacrificial service. Barclay goes on to say that we will sacrifice time, leisure and pleasure in order to serve God. He says the Christian life is a life more concerned with others than self!
- iii. *Follow me* – To go where Jesus would go, to talk like Jesus would talk and to act like Jesus would act.

- 1. **John 12:24-26** ²⁴ Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. ²⁵ He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.”

- b. **1 Timothy 4:7** “...exercise yourself toward godliness.”

Hebrews 12:1-2 ¹ 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, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

We are closing with a video that I find very impactful. I would like you to put yourself as the runner in this video and ask yourself these questions as you watch.

1. Am I on the track?
2. Am I running towards the finish line?
3. Am I running to receive the prize?

Paul, at the end of his life, said this in his valedictory.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 “⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

Christian, make sure NOTHING in your life detracts from you keeping
your eyes on Jesus!

THE Author AND Finisher of YOUR faith!