

Philippians 3:12—4:1

What did Paul mean (v. 12)? Not obtained all what? See 3:10 He was not there yet—his relationship with Christ was not yet complete, not perfect. He recognized that he didn't "know Christ" the way he wanted to. He had not already grasped the intimate knowledge of His Savior that he was seeking. 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 either completeness in all details *tamam* (Hebrew) or *katartizo* (Greek) which means reaching a goal or achieving a purpose. Christians do not attain sinlessness in this life.

Since Paul has "not already obtained all this," what was his strategy (v. 12)? Press on! Paul realized that he had a responsibility to pursue greater personal experiential knowledge of Christ, intimacy with Christ, conformity to Christ, and holiness. We too have a responsibility in our own journeys. Practical sanctification (growth and maturity) does not come automatically by faith as do justification and glorification. We must diligently and intentionally pursue it—by following the Lord.

Paul talked 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 a three-fold service: 1) as the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13), 2) spreading the gospel, 3) planting churches—all for the purpose of 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?**

What might be some of God's purposes in taking hold of you? Direct you to ministry in a specific area, give you a leadership role like Paul, conform you to Christ's image, etc.

Paul repeated his strategy which was what (v. 13-14). Press on! He did not look back. He chose not to dwell on both the undesirable things of the past nor his great accomplishments. Paul did not mean that he refused to remember things of his past, but rather that he did not rest in his heritage or past attainments (vv. 4-6). He had abandoned the unworthy goals of the past and was in pursuit of new ones in becoming more like Christ. He didn't make excuses; he never said, "I'm just human" or "we all make mistakes."

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

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 also serve as a deterrent to 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. Our destination is secure. 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 might be some examples of areas of our lives where we need to "press on?" Working out our salvation with fear and trembling (2:12). Marriage, career, family issues, finances, health. We need Paul's attitude of perseverance and deliberately living out our faith.

Paul's ambition was to "press on toward the goal to win the prize. (v. 14)" 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 come at the end of the race, when he had attained the goal but not before then.

What was Paul's point, "And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you" (v. 15)? He was saying that if their minds were set on anything else, any other goal in life, God would reveal that to them by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is comforting to know that when we get off track, God will point it out to us so we can get back on track.

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

Paul then said, "follow my example." Isn't that egotistical (v. 17)? Paul's advice might appear to some as egocentric but the reason he encouraged others to follow his example was that he was following Christ which was a contrast with the Judaizers. He was saying, "Don't follow them, follow me."

We often hear the expression in jest, "Do as I say, not as I do. Not so for Paul. He could hold up his own life as a model of wholehearted devotion to Christ.

Who are the "enemies of the cross of Christ" and what are their characteristics (v. 18)? Anyone who lives their life in direct contrast to the lives of discipline and sacrifice that followers of Christ endure, i.e. most of the unsaved world around us.

Paul was most likely specifically referring to the Antinomians. These were idolaters who advocated lawless living consisting of: 1) Free rein to satisfy 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 (materialism) to the utter exclusion of spiritual matters. Their philosophy is the exact opposite of the legalism that the Judaizers (v. 2) were teaching. Paul clearly had to deal with opposing heresies. **How do these heretics compare to those of today?**

What is the reason we should not follow the lifestyle of these 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 at the same time we have a responsibility to learn to live as foreigners and pilgrims while here.

Application: **Do we ever think of ourselves as foreigners? Do we eagerly await the return of Christ? If so, what are some things that should characterize our lives?** Courage, joy, excitement, a sense of urgency, 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 to our foolishness.

"Therefore" refers back to what (v. 4:1)? Because of the promise that we will be transformed to be like Jesus (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 had for these believers— he called 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.