

Title: Forgetting, Reaching, Pressing

Text: Philippians 3: 13-16

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Philippians 3: 13: Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

In order to understand Paul's message, we need to see a few scriptures and understand a few things. When a child of God is brought to believe on Christ he is perfect, complete in Christ.

Colossians 2: 9: For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10: And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

When brought to believe on Christ, we have already been made the righteousness of God in Christ; we have already been made holy in Christ; we have already been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. As Ephesians 2:6 says we already *sit in heavenly places in Christ*.

Also, in the new birth, God the Holy Spirit creates within us a new man after the image of God. In the resurrection, Christ shall create for us a new body after his image. But in the new birth, God creates a new spirit, a new man within his child.

Ephesians 4: 24:...ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

The new man is God's workmanship—*which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*. The Spirit of God declares, "*if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*" (Rom 8: 10) The new man created within is holy.

A newborn baby grows from a baby, to a child, to a teen, to a man, to a mature man. But the baby does not become more human. The new man *grows in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus*. But we do not become more holy or sanctified.

And this growth in grace is by *the knowledge of Christ*. In Philippians 3 that is what Paul is dealing with, his desire to know Christ more. He knew that the new man is grown the same way we are created. He knew we are renewed by *the knowledge of Christ*—the incorruptible seed whereby the gospel is preached unto you. He said this is how we were born:

2 Corinthians 4: 6: For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST.

He knew it is by the same knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are renewed and grown in grace.

2 Corinthians 3: 18:...we all, with open face beholding as in a glass [the knowledge of] THE GLORY OF THE LORD [in the face of Jesus Christ], are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Colossians 3:10: And have put on the new man, which is renewed in KNOWLEDGE after the image of him that created him:

The apostle Peter says the same. We are grown in grace in the new man, according as or the same way as, the Lord initially created the new man, through the knowledge of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. [My comments are added in the brackets to help see this better.]

2 Peter 1: 2: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, AND OF JESUS OUR LORD, 3: According as [or the same way as] his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, [in the new man in the new birth] through THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM that hath called us to glory and virtue: 4: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these [by the promises of the gospel of the knowledge of Christ] ye might be partakers of the divine nature, [ye might have Christ formed in you in the new man.] having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. [Christ in us delivers us from the corruption and lust of the old man of flesh in that Christ reigns within rather than our old flesh] 5: And beside this, [beside the new man being created within us in the new birth by hearing the knowledge of Christ in the gospel, we are grown in grace by] giving all diligence, [to the gospel of the knowledge of Christ] add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6: And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7: And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. 8: For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. 9: But he that lacketh these things [he that lacks a diligence in focusing all his affection on Christ] is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 10: Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, [if ye give all diligence to the gospel to grow in grace through the knowledge of Christ] ye shall never fall: 11: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

When a believer gives diligence to feed his flesh by minding earthly things, our old man of flesh grows stronger so that we become blind and unable to see afar off. We become unable to set our affection on things above where Christ sits at God's right hand and our sin begins to trouble us. We are not lost but there is a sense in which we forget that Christ has purged us from our old sins. But when we give all diligence to hear the gospel preached and study God's word then through the knowledge of Christ the heavens are opened to us and an entrance ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior so that our affection is set on things above, rather than on this earth, and we behold that we are dead and our life is hid in Christ at God's right hand. This is the subject of Peter's second epistle. So he ends the same way he begins:

2 Peter 3: 17: Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness [in Christ]. 18: But grow in grace, and *in* THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen.

The apostle Paul is declaring the same thing in Philippians 3. He is declaring that he counts all things loss that he might grow in the knowledge of Christ.

Philippians 3: 8: Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST JESUS MY LORD: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ. 9: And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10: That I may KNOW HIM, and the POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION, and the FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS, being made CONFORMABLE UNTO HIS DEATH; 11: If by any means I might attain unto the RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD [or as Peter said so that an entrance shall be ministered unto me into his kingdom] 12: Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Proposition: The one desire of the believer whose inward man is created *by the knowledge of Christ* is to *grow in grace by growing in the knowledge of Christ.*

Our title includes our divisions: Forgetting, Reaching, Pressing

FORGETTING

Philippians 3: 13: Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind,*...

There are many things that we must forget so that it does not hinder us from reaching forth to grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

One, I should forget the days of my rebellion and unbelief.

Now, there are times when it is good to remember the pit from which we were digged. But only to remember what Christ has done in delivering us from that pit. It is terrible when men remember past sins with joy and fondness as if they would gladly return to that life of sin and rebellion. In that case, we must forget those things which are behind so that we are committed to Christ, with no option of returning to our prior sinful life.

When Caesar invaded England he was surrounded by the English on the Cliffs of Dover and the surrounding hills. He was outnumbered. So he wanted total commitment from his soldiers with no option of retreat back across the English Channel. Therefore, when they landed on the shores of England, he burned all their ships. Our Lord said, "*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*" (Lu 9:62) So let us burn every ship, forgetting those sinful days that are behind, so that there is no option of retreat back into a life of sin and rebellion.

And if past sins make me doubt that Christ has indeed purged my sin, as he did all his elect, then I must forget those things which are behind. Then we become like the little boy whose father took him for a walk along the river. When they first started out the little boy fell in the mud. His father picked him up, brushed him off, said, "*Follow me.*" They came to a large pin oak tree. The father taught him how that big tree came from an acorn falling into the earth and dying. But the little boy was thinking back on how he fell. He was looking at himself, at his muddy pants and heard nothing the father taught him right then. When past sins make us cast down they make us cease giving all diligence to the gospel of Christ which God is teaching us right now. Then we become "*blind and cannot see afar off and forget that Christ purged us from our old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.*" How so? "Forgetting those sins that are behind." Do you think some past sin is too great for the grace of God? Paul held men's coats while they killed Stephen! But Paul said, "*this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind.*"

Two, is good to forget my profession in false religion and my attempts to produce a righteousness before God. Paul spoke of his vain religion—"*Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; ...touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.* (vv5-6) Those self-righteous deeds were worse than any of his immoral deeds. We tend to dwell on past immoral sins but our self-righteous religion was worse sin than any immoral sin. But let us do as Paul. He said, "*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*" "*Forgetting those things that are behind...*"

Three, it is good to forget even the good works done in the name of Christ in truth. When Paul recalled his good works in the cause of Christ, he said, "*I am become a fool in glorying.*" (2 Cor 12: 11)—"*forgetting those things that are behind!*"

Four, it is good to forget family and friends in the sense that I do not let them come between me and Christ. Never do anything mean or harmful to family or friends. Care for them, be patient with them, and love them to Christ. But when I remember how far away I am from my family it makes me so weak at times. But my family loves Christ and they love the brethren in Christ to whom I minister. They know this is God's will and they know I am preaching our Redeemer! So when thoughts of my family would come between me and Christ, God says, "*Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; FORGET also thine own people, and thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.*" (Ps 45: 10-11)

Five, it is good to forget past misunderstandings when a brother or sister in Christ offended me. Knowing God remembers *my* sins against him no more; knowing by his precious blood Christ cast our sins behind his back as far as the east is from the west, how unmerciful would I be not to forget yours!—"*forgetting those things that are behind!*"

Anything that would hinder us from diligently giving ourselves to the gospel of Christ that we might grow in the knowledge of Christ we must forget.

REACHING

Philippians 3: 13...and reaching forth unto those things which are before,...

As we forget those things that are behind we should be reaching forth to know more of Christ—“*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death*” (v10)

We reach forth to know more than a bare knowledge of facts or doctrine; we reach forth to know Christ himself, to know the power of his resurrection for our justification within our hearts today.

Do not be satisfied with some past experience. Reach forth to know Christ presently. Lean upon him and live upon him today. I delight that God sovereignly chose his people in Christ before the world was made solely by his grace, apart from our works. But I want to know that I am his child and that I am his child right now. I want to know that my sovereign Savior lives at God’s right hand because he fulfilled all righteousness for me and that I am there in him right now. I want to always be reaching forth to know God’s free forgiveness and acceptance in Christ because Christ is reigning in my own heart right now!

The most common problem I hear is from folks is due to them looking to some past act in an attempt to find present assurance. They end up finding something which makes them doubt. What if I found assurance in something I did or did not do in the past? My assurance would be in me and my works? When we are looking back or looking at ourselves we are looking in the wrong direction and at the wrong person. We have videos of our son from the day he was born. How crazy would it be if he had to go back to those videos to assure himself that he is alive today? We do not need to go back to know we are alive, reach forth to Christ today!

Two, I want to reach forth to know the *fellowship of his sufferings* till it melts my heart into submission making my *whole life conformable to his death*. We have all heard preachers use our text to preach morality until at last their so-called holiness outshines their sinfulness. But that is just a bunch of pride and arrogance and self-righteousness. In the context of the whole epistle, and all Paul’s letters, when Paul speaks of *knowing the fellowship of his suffering so that it makes him conformable unto his death*, he means being so acquainted with Christ laying down his life for the glory of God and the salvation of his people until it makes him have the mind of Christ. Paul means this,

Philippians 1: 27: Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind **STRIVING TOGETHER [reaching forth] FOR THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL**; 28: And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. 29: For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but **ALSO TO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE**; 30: Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

Paul was in prison for refusing to take the offense out of the cross. He was in prison for reaching forth, striving together with the saints for preaching the gospel Christ’s faithfulness whereby his people are made righteous in him. Paul says and not only is it give to us to believe, but also to suffer for his sake even as Paul suffered for the sake of Christ and his gospel.

Philippians 2: 1: If *there be* **THEREFORE** any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any **FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT**, if any bowels and mercies, 2: Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be **LIKEMINDED**, having the **SAME LOVE**, *being* of **ONE ACCORD**, of **ONE MIND**. 3: *Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in **LOWLINESS OF MIND** let each esteem **OTHER BETTER THAN THEMSELVES**. 4: Look not every man on his own things, but every man also **ON THE THINGS OF OTHERS**. 5: Let **THIS MIND** be in you, which was **ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS**: 6: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not

robbery to be equal with God: 7: But made himself of NO REPUTATION, and took upon him the form OF A SERVANT, and was made in the likeness of men: 8: And being found in fashion as a man, he HUMBLED himself, and became OBEDIENT UNTO DEATH, EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS.

He is teaching us to reach forth and become so acquainted with Christ's suffering and obedience to the Father even unto the death of the cross until we have the same mind toward Christ that he had toward the Father. So that knowing Christ triumphantly exalted God as Just and Justifier, knowing Christ triumphantly redeemed every chosen child of God, and knowing God has highly exalted him and given him a name above every name and that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess him to be Lord of lords and King of kings, when we suffer from men rejecting Christ and our gospel, we will submit all to Christ and trust him. And that we do likewise toward our brethren. He says,

Philippians 2: 12:...work out your own salvation...

The word "salvation" is the same word as "affairs" in Philippians 1: 27. He is saying work out your own affairs in the church amongst your brethren and amongst your enemies without

Philippians 2: 12...with fear and trembling. 13: For it is God which worketh in you [in your brethren and in the midst of you in the church] both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure. 14: Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 15: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; 16: Holding forth the word of life;...

You see, it is not about mere morality. We are to reach forth to know Christ so that when we suffer for his gospel we are made conformable to his death. We submit all to Christ, in fear and trembling, without murmuring and disputing, even as Christ was obedient to the Father. This we are to do so that we be no distraction as we hold forth the gospel of Christ and him crucified. Let us reach forth to know Christ so our life is taken up with preaching him to others and drawing their focus to him rather than to us. We want to reach forth to know Christ so that he might make us jealous for his honor and glory; that he might make us a savor of Christ every place we go and among everyone we meet. It is not a duty; it is privilege when we see how he suffered and bled and was forsaken on the cross for sinners like us!

There has only been a few times in my life where I suffered a little in the cause of Christ. But it was the best time of my life because the Lord forced me to behold that I have no strength in myself to deliver me or anyone else. The Lord forced me to wait on him and look to him. And the Lord made me experience that his grace truly is sufficient.

PRESSING

Philippians 3: 13 Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The word "press" means it will not be easy. Everything, from our own sinful flesh to this world to the devil is going to be against us. So we have to press. But God has set a race before us and the mark, the prize, toward whom we press is Christ himself in glory where we will be with him forever.

Hebrews 12: 1: Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3: For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. 4: Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

The race set before him which he endured was the cross and the shame of the sin and curse of his people, of being forsaken by God in fierce wrath, of being alone with none to help as he bore a contradiction of sinners against himself. Yet, Christ pressed on toward the mark for the prize.

He did it *for the joy that was set before him*: the joy of declaring his Father just and Justifier, the joy of honoring his law and fulfilling all the scriptures, the joy of preparing a place for us in heaven. Through it all, pressed toward the mark so much that *he resisted, striving against sin, until he bled*.

Brethren, I don't ever want to say, "Well, I've done enough, let some other brother take over from here." "*Consider him, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds, you have not resisted unto blood striving against sin.*" Our affliction is light and but for a moment when compared to our Substitute. So let us "*press on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ.*"

When I visited with Brother Henry and Doris last week, I was already studying our text. There are two believers who pressed on serving Christ faithfully for fifty five years. Even now, in bodies that are over ninety years old, they continue to press toward the mark. They continue to minister to their brethren, exhorting them to the importance of hearing the gospel and encouraging them, by simply continuing to assemble to hear the gospel preached. I thought of Paul's words to Timothy. It describes them both. I hope by the grace of Christ each of us will be like them and never look anywhere but Christ so that one day we can say what they can say; what the apostle Paul said,

2 Timothy 4: 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Amen!