

Philippians 3:12-31

Verse 12:

--Paul wants to make it clear that he has not **attained** or **perfected** this goal of knowing Christ. His personal pursuit of God wasn't finished. He hadn't "made it."

--Instead, he was intent to **press on** in knowing Jesus Christ because he knew there was so much more! He is using the image of a race as is used in many other Scriptures (**1 Cor. 9:24; Gal. 5:7; Heb. 12:1**).

--Paul's desire was to **lay hold** of Christ and His purposes in the apostle's life. Paul saw it as the pursuit of the One who pursued and took hold of him on the road to Damascus. *The Hound of Heaven by Francis Thompson*

Verses 13-14:

--**(13) Brethren. . .** Paul pleads with them as family, repeating his desire to pursue Christ and adding three points of instruction. His pursuit of God was singular, present, and heavenly.

1) First, Paul's focus is singular: **One thing I do. . .**

--We are so very finite! Our hearts and lives cannot be given to anything and everything. We must not pour out the precious drink offering of our very lives at every altar we see.

--To be divided or crowded hinders our pursuit of God.

Matthew 13:22: Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

James 1:8: he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Psalm 86:11: Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.

2) Second, Paul's focus is present: **forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. . .**

--Looking backward while running is always hazardous! The enemy will take our focus off of Christ by turning our attention to all our past sins and failures—pre and post-conversion.

--Not only does Paul consider his past loss or rubbish, but says the past is to be forgotten—forgotten in the sense that it doesn't hinder his present pursuit of Christ. It doesn't stumble him or trip him up. *Paul knows how to make good use of a mental trash can!*

--**reaching forward** gives the idea of *eagerly straining forward*—like a runner with the finish line in sight. This is Paul's present condition.

--Some Christians are forever doing nothing presently because they once did badly. God doesn't measure our life off of its worst moment: *Just think of Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, or Paul!*

--Make sure you are pursuing God presently and not historically. Today and not yesterday.

--**(14) 3) Third, Paul's focus is heavenly: I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

--Paul doesn't despise the prize. He knows the prize comes at the end of the race. A prize that is part of an **upward** or *heavenly* calling.

--All believers have a calling related to something more than this world (**1 Cor. 1:9; Eph. 4:1; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1**).

2 Peter 1:10-11: *Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

--Do we only press toward earthly goals? Do we only labor for things that will perish?

*Boreham (New Testament Essays): *"Lying open on my desk at this moment is a copy of Edward Whymper's 'Scrambles Among the Alps'. I have been re-reading the closing sentences. 'The play is over,' Mr. Whymper says, 'and the curtain is about to fall. Before we part, a word about the graver teaching of the mountains. See yonder height! Tis far away, and high above, the ascent seems utterly impossible.' No, Mr. Whymper declares, it is not impossible; but its conquest will need a caution and a perseverance almost superhuman. 'We who go mountain-scrambling know,' adds Mr. Whymper, 'that each height, each step, must be gained by patient, laborious toil, and that wishing cannot take the place of working.'"**

--Has wishing taken the place of working for our upward call? May God strengthen us to live for our calling to an eternal kingdom, and not as Francis Schaeffer describes: *Ash heap lives*.

Verses 15-16:

--**(15) Therefore.** . . is application and appeal. Here is the intent which drove Paul to share about his personal pursuit of God.

--**Let us.** . . this is not just for apostles, but for all believers! **As many as are mature have this mind.** . . Thinking like this characterizes mature Christianity—to make Christ the true object and treasure of your life. This thought process will be the basic frame of mind (way of looking at life) for all mature men and women of God.

--**and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.** . . this is a strange way to finish his exhortation. There are numerous ways commentators think this phrase applies.

--I believe Paul is saying that if anyone believes he is over-exaggerating, or over-emphasizing what a Christian's pursuit of God should be, and they think **otherwise** (They believe in God and His Word but think walking with Him looks differently). Paul is convinced his mindset will prove itself out—**God will reveal even this to you.**

--Paul was always so gracious to think of those who were still babes in the Christian life and not yet mature in Him.

--**(16) Nevertheless** . . . brings us to something that applies no matter where we are in our walk with Christ. We are all called to live up to what we have been given in this life. *In respect to our age and station—baby, teen, adult, elderly, etc.*

Proverbs 16:31: *The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness.*

Verses 17-19:

--(17) Paul knew that there would be many people who claim Jesus with their lips but live lives that work against God's ends, fulfill personal lusts, glory in shame, and end in destruction.

--That said, he exhorts them to follow ***my example***. . . and that of others—***us***—probably thinking about men like Timothy and Epaphroditus. This is not pride. This is normal life. Parents, social groups, and sports teams all encourage a certain type of life example.

--Paul regularly appealed to his life as an example or model: **Acts 20:17-35; 1 Cor. 4:16; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:5-6; 2:9-12; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7-8.**

1 Corinthians 11:1: *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

--Jesus Christ (**Jn. 13:15**) and the apostle Peter do the same (**1 Peter 2:21; 5:3**).

--Christian leaders are to lay down a ***pattern*** or example of Christian life. The Greek word for ***pattern*** (*typos*) was used for the mark left after a strike, or the print/impression left after a blow. It is the same word Thomas uses when he speaks of ***the print of the nails*** in Jesus' hands (**Jn. 20:25**).

--Paul isn't saying—be me. Paul is saying follow Christ with the same intent, focus, drive, goal, mindset that I have. Individual pursuit of God will, in fact, magnify individuality! *Think of differences of any godly OT or NT character!*

--It is the modeling of Christian life, not the declaration of Christian doctrine, that is the most powerful of all Christian witnesses.

--Sadly, Christian models are disappearing in the church and in the home. We need more, not less! The cultural emphasis is so on the acceptance of failure that we almost shun godly models as unrealistic. *What if you and I were followed for a month by an unbeliever? Would they see a godly model? What of our own kids or family?!*

--(18) ***For many walk***. . . the reference here to ***many*** makes it unlikely Paul is thinking about a large segment of the Philippian congregation. No doubt the letter would be much different if that were true.

--This group of ***many*** is likely a wider Church problem of those outside the fellowship seeking to make their way into the fellowship either physically or by influence.

--***of whom I have told you often***. . . This was one of Paul's repeated warnings.

Acts 20:30-31: *Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*

--***and now tell you even weeping***. . . These individuals broke Paul's heart. He doesn't change his opinion that they are enemies of the cross of Christ and others need to be warned about them, but he does care that they are on the wrong road.

*Tozer (Keys to the Deeper Life): *"I admit that there are parents who counsel me about the danger of losing young people from our church life because I am faithful in preaching against this present worldly system in which we live.*

*"I can only say that I am concerned and I will stand and cry at the door when they decide to go, but I will not be guilty of deceiving them. I refuse to deceive and damn them by teaching that you can be a Christian and love this present world, for you cannot."**

--What is the biggest problem with this segment? ***They are enemies of the cross of Christ!***

--What does that mean? Enemies of the cross of Christ are those who ignore the mindset and life of **2:5-11** and all that Paul has been encouraging.

****Matthew 16:23: But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."****

****Romans 15:1-3: We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."****

--Paul explains what the life example of an enemy of the cross of Christ looks like:

--***(19) Whose end is destruction.*** . . This is one of the three most common descriptions of hell: (Banishment, Punishment, Destruction).

****Matthew 7:13: Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.****

--Not annihilation but destruction. . . like the demolition of a home or building. The structure is not gone, it is rubble, no longer what it once was or fit for its past purposes.

--***whose god is their belly.*** . . Living to eat Vs. Eating to live. No hallowed chapel in their life, but plenty of bars and restaurants! John Trapp calls this: *the worship of the dunghill deity!*

--***whose glory is in their shame.*** . . They delight in what they should feel shameful of—porn, abortion, hate, drunkenness, adultery, etc.

--In fact, they are ashamed to be ashamed of their shame! They ***not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Rom. 1:32).***

--***who set their mind on earthly things.*** . . To die for them is not gain! To take up their cross and follow Christ is not gain! Heaven is not gain! All they have and love is in this world.

--An enemy of the cross is centrally worldly and not heavenly.

****Romans 8:5: For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.****

*Bunyan (Pilgrims Progress): *“Interpreter takes them apart again, and has them first into a room where was a man that could look no way but downwards, with a muck-rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered to give him that crown for his muck-rake; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor. . . it is to show that heaven is but as a fable to some, and that things here are counted the only things substantial. Now whereas it was also showed you, that the man could look no way but downwards, it is to let you know that earthly things, when they are with power upon men’s minds, quite carry their hearts away from God.”**

Colossians 3:2: Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Verses 20-21:

--(20) As Roman citizens, they understood the reality of being a colony of heaven in the outpost of Rome. We too, are a colony of heaven in the outpost of Philadelphia.

--The true Christian message is unashamedly about heaven! You cannot preach it, live it, or rejoice in it correctly otherwise. We eagerly wait for Jesus and the rewards He promised.

Hebrews 11:16: But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

--When speaking of Christ here, Paul uses the exalted Name of **2:11: the Lord Jesus Christ!**

--(21) In a body, Jesus Christ came and was humbled. In His glorified body, He will come again and rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

--His promise to us is that we will be made like Him.

1 Corinthians 15:22-23: For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.

--New bodies! You will become happier and happier about this as your life goes on. As the old model does less and less of what it used to do, and more and more of what you don’t want it to do, you will find great joy in the transformation **of our lowly body** into one like **His glorious body**.

--How can this happen? **According to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself**. . . because He is our Creator! He made all things knowing this very purpose.