

A FOCUS FOR LIFE Sunday School- August 15, 2010

Unifying Topic: LIVING INTO THE FUTURE

Lesson Text

I. Focus On Knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7-11)

II. Focus On the Goal (Philippians 3:12-14)

III. Focus On Christian Living (Philippians 3:15-16)

The Main Thought: 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. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Many people are preoccupied with past failures or achievements. How can our lives achieve fresh focus? The Christian faith draws us into the future, preoccupied with god's mission in Christ.

Lesson Aim: The lesson aim is to teach believers how to serve God through serving others.

Life aim: To teach believers the benefit of having a single-minded focus in life for the cause of Christ.

3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

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,

3:9 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:

3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

3:11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

3:12 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.

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,

3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

3:15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

3:16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

HISTORY:

PAUL WARNS THEM AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS:

At the beginning of Chapter 3, Paul says, "*Finally.*" This is not the close of the letter but the beginning of Paul's last main teaching topic, warning the Philippians against false teachers. Paul explains that the believer must press on for Christ, first guarding themselves by:

1. rejoicing in the Lord (v1).
2. heeding to what is written (the scripture) (v1).
3. watching out for false teachers (v2).
4. Knowing that you are the true (spiritual) circumcision (v3).

3:1a IN ORDER TO REJOICE, KNOW TO:

1. Guard yourself by rejoicing in the Lord.

As the believer walks through life, two things are always confronting him: circumstances and false teaching. No matter where he goes, the trials of life, both minor and major, confront him.

- enticing temptations
- lust of the eyes
- lust of the flesh
- greed
- selfishness
- arguments
- divisions
- Inhuman behavior
- criminal acts
- death
- accidents
- disease

The list could go on and on. False teachings of this life also confront him. The point is this: if the believer is to press on in his Christian life, he must walk about rejoicing in the Lord. The great thing about rejoicing is that it places and keeps a person in the presence of Christ, knowing what **He** has done. Our mind cannot be in two places at once. If it is upon the Lord and His glorious salvation, then it cannot be upon the trials and false teachings of this world.

No matter what confronts the believer—no matter how terrible the trial—he knows that nothing can separate him from the Lord and His love—that he shall never dies, but rather live eternally. Therefore, he knows that whatever comes upon him can never conquer and overcome him. Christ will give him supernatural power and strength to overcome it. And

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if he is called upon to lay down his body and move on to heaven, he knows that he shall never taste or experience death; he knows that Jesus Christ is going to escort him right on into God's presence immediately—quicker than the eye can blink—about $\frac{11}{100}$ of a second. The believer is forever secure in the keeping power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, he walks rejoicing in the Lord: he rejoices no matter what confronts him. Real joy is only found in fellowship with God.

3:1b AS PAUL KEEPS WRITING, KNOW TO:

2. Guard yourself by heeding to what is written, that is, in the scriptures. Paul says that he is writing some things that he had apparently written before. Therefore, it must be repeated and the church must do what is being said. What scriptures says, was written to instruct us and to help us in pressing on for Christ. No person can press on apart from heeding the scriptures. If he fails to study and obey the scripture, he will cave in either to the trials of life or to false teaching. Only as we obey the scripture—the commandments of the Lord—can we show our love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3:2 AS THE WORD KEEP YOU SAFE, SO DOES A WARNING:

3. Guard yourself by watching out for false teachers. Paul was always facing false teachers who were savage in their attacks upon him. He mentions three groups of false teachers in this verse.
 1. Beware of false teachers who act like "dogs" (*kunas*). It should be noted that both Jew and Gentile called each other dogs as a term of contempt. The word "dogs" was the lowest title possible to convey contempt and ridicule. They were the scavengers and snarlers who could be very vicious and dangerous. There are some false teachers who are just like dogs.
 2. Beware of the false teachers who are evil workers.
 - a. This refers to those who hold to and teach high standards of righteousness, morality, and religion. They are absolutely sure that they are righteous and good—at least good enough to be acceptable to God. There is just no way God would ever reject them—so they think.
 - b. They also refer to those who live and teach evil by the way they live and talk about morality, righteousness and religion. Some live base, immoral, indulgent, and extravagant lives, while others try to mix both a religious and indulgent life-style together.

The point is this: there are those who are always opposing the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation by grace alone. They do not accept that He is God's Son—that He is the Lord of man's life; the Lord who is to be given all we say are and have. Therefore, they accept His teaching, but ignore or deny salvation by His blood. They stand opposed to the gospel of salvation by His grace alone. They go about establishing their own way to God, doing whatever good they feel is needed to make themselves acceptable to Him. The result is false teaching—a way to God that stands against the Lord Jesus Christ and His way. Such false teachers are evil workers—stand opposed to the truth.

3. Beware of false teachers who are of the concision. The concision refers to the Judaizers.

Note:

Remember that most of the believers at Jerusalem were Jews. They had been circumcised when eight days old and had been steeped in the Law of Moses since childhood. When they accepted Christ, some just refused to forsake their Judaistic religion. They say Christianity is only as an extension of Judaism. In their minds Christ had only added new teachings to their existing law and religion.

These Judaizers were men who mixed ritual and law with the gospel of Christ. Paul's argument was that this teaching was the very opposite of the true gospel. A man is not saved by fleshly signs nor by ritual nor by his own ability to keep the law and regulations and rules. However, these men still hung on to their Judaistic religion, in particular to the rite of circumcision and to the Law of Moses. They believed a man became a Christian...

- By first becoming a Jew—with all its rituals and ceremonies and be circumcised...
- Then the man could accept Christ as his Savior.

3:3 AS WE WORSHIP:

4. Guard yourself by knowing that you are the true circumcision. Note believers are called "*the circumcision*." What does Paul mean?
 1. Believers are those who worship God as He really wishes to be worshipped: in the spirit; that is, they have circumcised or cut away the flesh as the means by which they worship God. Most people worship God...
 - By attending church services
 - By praying
 - By making occasional gifts to needy causes
 - By thinking of God occasionally
 - By being circumcised or baptized or undergoing some other ritual
 - By keeping the rituals and ceremonies of a church
 - By joining a church
 - By observing special days

But note a critical point: as good as all of these are, they are not the basis of true worship. They are things that we do because we worship; they are the result and activities of worship. They are not the basis or spirit of worship. True, they may help us focus upon God and stir us to worship Him, but as stated, they are not the basis and spirit of worship. True worship has to be of the heart and spirit. Why? Because a man can attend church, keep all the rituals and ceremonies, and still be living in the depths of sin. But if a man's spirit is right with God, he worships God with a clean and pure heart, free from all sin and defilement. The truly circumcised person is the person who worships God in spirit.

2. Believers are those who rejoice as God really wants us to rejoice: in Christ Jesus. How can we boast and rejoice in ritual and ceremony and religion when the Source—the Author and Finisher—of our faith is Christ Jesus? Therefore, the true circumcision, the true believer does not boast in anything physical or material—not in ritual or ceremony or religion. The true circumcision rejoices and boasts in Him who has given us salvation and access to God, even in Christ Jesus our Lord.
3. Believers are those who have no confidence in the flesh. The flesh ages, deteriorates, and corrupts. And no matter what the flesh has done and accomplished in this physical world, it takes all its ability of works to the grave with it. The flesh dies and all that concerns the flesh dies with it. Therefore, the true circumcision, the true believer, has no confidence and puts no stock in the flesh. He has confidence only in Jesus Christ.

NOTE:

Before Christ, circumcision was the physical sign that a man was a follower of the true God. It was the sign that a man believed the promises that God had made to Abraham and Israel. God never intended circumcision to have any value other than being a sign. It was not to bring righteousness to any man—not even to Abraham. It was given only as a sign—a sign of the faith that a man already had in God's promises.

3: 4-6 PAUL'S ADVANTAGES:

3:4 Paul says, "*Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any man thinks he can trust in the works and attainments of his flesh, I more:*" (I can trust and boast in the goodness and morality and works of the flesh as much as any man who has ever lived). Paul had achieved the height of self-righteousness. Paul ranks among the greatest of men who have attempted to work their way into God's presence. He did all the good he could to secure God's approval. Few if any men have ever attained what Paul did by human effort. Yet, it was all to no avail. His goodness and his attainments did not make him acceptable to God. And there is one primary reason: he could not make himself perfect. Paul presented his pedigree and claims to have more ground for boasting than anyone else, however, it falls short of God's holy standards, no matter how impressive. Paul lists seven privileges and achievements which show the total inadequacy of man to save himself and he divides the list under "*Privileges of Birth...*" **Verse 5a** begins the advantages from his family:

1. "*Circumcision the eighth day*": Paul was saying that he had the right birth. So his Jewish parents obeyed the command that God gave to Abraham (Genesis 17:12). He was a true child of Abraham. **It cannot save you:** Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in birth or in religious rituals and ceremonies. Yet, how many people think they are acceptable to God because they...
 - have godly parents? • have godly grandparents? • have kept religious rituals and ceremonies?
 - have a godly spouse? • have godly friends? (and they're all praying for you)How many expect the godliness of others to just rub off on them –to count them and make them acceptable?
2. "*Of the stock of Israel*": Paul is saying that he had the right national heritage and a very special relationship with God. Israel was the name that God gave to Jacob (Genesis 32:28). When a Jew wished to stress his special relationship to God, he called himself an Israelite; that is, he was of the nation and descent of Israel which had a very special relationship with God and who had received a very special name from God. **It cannot save you:** Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in ancestors or in social superiority. Yet, how many think that being born in a Christian nation and surrounded by Christian principles carry some merit with God?
3. "*Of the tribe of Benjamin*": Benjamin was the child of Rachel whom Jacob loved; the only son of Jacob that was born in the promised country (Genesis 35:16-18). And because Benjamin was considered the aristocratic tribe and of the tribe's courageous acts throughout Israel's history (Judg.5:14; Hos.5:8), it was a shoe-in. Paul was saying that he was of the highest aristocracy of the most noble of the most respectable persons of Israel. **It cannot save you:** Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in social or religious status. Yet, how many feel they are more acceptable to God because they belong to...
 - an upper class? • a more elite church? • a more dynamic church? • a more active ministry?

If *Privileges of Birth* are not impressive enough, then "*Achievements by Self-Effort*." **Verse 5b-6** begins achievements by self-effort:

4. "*An Hebrew of the Hebrews*": Paul claimed to have the right language and the right customs. He had deliberately kept the Hebrew tongue and refused to forget it. In his day, this was extremely difficult, for the Jews were literally scattered across the world and the world had one common language, Greek. Paul had gone to Jerusalem in order to learn from Gamaliel, a famous Jewish teacher (Acts 22:3). Now Paul was well versed and speaking Hebrew, the Jewish language. **It cannot save you:** Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in religious faithfulness, nor in a spiritual language, nor in the ability to know and speak in religious terms. Yet, how many think that they are acceptable to God because they...
 - do good and are faithful in being good?
 - Are faithful in talking about and sharing spiritual things?
 - are faithful in studying their religion, the Bible, and the great doctrines of the faith?
 - know and use religious terms and languages?
5. "*A Pharisee*": Paul claimed to have had the right religion; to have been a Pharisee. He had chosen to be a Pharisee like his parents (Acts 23:6). Pharisees were the strictest of Jews; so strict that their very name meant "*The Separated Ones*." He devoted his life to the most "*separated*" and demanding religion ever known to man. He achieved "*separation*", exacting separation from other men. **It cannot save you:** Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in religion, nor even in being a follower of the true religion. Yet, how many feel the very opposite?
6. "*Zeal*": Paul had zealously stood and fought for his religion. He sought to wipe out any cause that differed from his (Acts 22:2-21; 26:4-33; 1Corth.15:8-10; Gal.1:13). He was as zealous as a [person could be in trying to reach converts for his religion and in keeping his religion as pure as he could, but for the wrong reasons **It cannot save you:** Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in religious commitments or zeal that are misguided. Few have ever been committed to their religion like Paul; few have ever been as faithful to the worship services, ordinances, rituals, and ceremonies of his religion like Paul.
7. "*Blameless*": Paul claimed he had sought to keep the law and he had kept it completely and fully—being blameless. This does not mean that Paul was sinless. It meant that when Paul sinned, he obeyed the law and took his sacrifice to the temple. He obeyed all the commandments, rituals, and ceremonies just like scripture said. He followed all the laws and instructions of the scripture. He was blameless—ritually and ceremonially—in the righteousness of the law. **It cannot save you:** Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in keeping all the rituals and ceremonies of religion. They are not even found in keeping all the commandments of the scripture, because you can't!

LESSON:

Philippians 3:7-11 Focus On Knowing Christ

Paul says, "*But what things were gain to me.*" "*Gain*" means asset, profit, anything that would be an advantage. Paul had (past) natural pride in his Jewish attainment, but all these assets did not save him, justify him, give him peace, nor bring him into fellowship with God. As Paul focused on knowing Christ...

- (3:7) 1. Paul had a past experience with Christ: there was a time when he counted his own righteousness as loss. Paul was referring to his conversion experience. There was a time when he had given up his own self-righteousness and works, his own attempts to become perfect—he could not gain righteousness—he could not make himself perfectly acceptable to God.
- a. Note that this is a definite time when Paul made a definite decision—a decision that he was unable to secure righteousness and perfection himself. He had to trust the love of God.
 - b. Note also that this did not mean that Paul quit trying to live for God. On the contrary, it meant that Paul tried more diligently than ever to live for God. When God saw Paul's total commitment to Christ, God knew that Paul's faith was genuine.
- (3:8) 2. Paul had a continuous experience with Christ: he constantly counted all things as loss and as waste in order to win Christ. The word "*count*" is in the present tense; it is continuous action. When a person has made the decision to seek after Christ, he is "*to continue*" to seek after the knowledge of Christ—to learn all he can about the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ.
- It is not a matter of making a decision to follow Christ, and then turning and walking on as a person has always walked—doing his own thing and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind.
 - It is making a decision to follow Christ and continuing to seek after the knowledge of Him—continuing to seek to know him more and more.
 - a. Note that the knowledge of Christ is said to be excellent. The knowledge of Christ is the most excellent way in all the world. No other knowledge can give a person righteousness and perfection or make a

person acceptable to God and give him the right to live eternally.

- b. Note what Paul says: "*I have suffered the loss of all things.*" The words "*have suffered*" mean to forfeit and to cast away. The phrase "*all things*" includes not only the religious position Paul had attained, but the social financial, intellectual and political gains he had made as well.

(3:9) 3. Paul sought a future experience with Christ: he sought to be found in Christ. Paul was looking ahead either to death or to the return of Christ.

- a. Note that the righteousness of God is Christ Himself. It does not refer to a behavior or works or deeds of righteousness. No matter how good the works or deeds may be.
- b. Note a right relationship with God did not come by obeying the Law of Moses. It came as a gift from God that Paul accepted by faith in Jesus Christ.

(3:10) 4. Paul sought a victorious experience with Christ: he sought to know Christ—to know His glorious power over the world and all that is in the world.

- a. To know Christ is to know the power of His resurrection. This refers to three great things:
 - i. The power to raise Christ shows that God has the power to conquer all the trials and temptations of life. When God exercised this power, He conquered the most powerful trial that faces man—death. And in conquering death, God demonstrated that He has the power to conquer any trial or temptation of man, no matter what it is.
 - ii. The resurrection of Jesus Christ shows that God has the power to give man a new life, and the power to live a new life before Him. After Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, man was not living his old life—the life he had before Christ's death. He now lives before God in newness of life, seated with God Almighty, and placed in his rightful place!
 - iii. The power to raise Christ from the dead shows that that God has the power to raise men from the dead. The believer shall experience the great resurrection power of God and be resurrected from the dead.

The point of God's power is clear: Christ can conquer death, can live in us, and can raise us from the dead.

- b. To know Christ is to know the fellowship of His sufferings. Most of us are willing to share in the blessings of Christ but we want nothing to do with the sufferings of Christ. We shrink from the ridicule, questioning, and abuse He had to bear. Paul wanted to share in *the purpose for which Christ was suffering*. Why did Christ suffer? He suffered because He proclaimed the righteousness of God—because He proclaimed the way men could become acceptable to God and live forever. Paul was saying that he wanted to suffer right along with Christ, suffer for the same cause—suffer for proclaiming the righteousness and salvation of God.

Note one other thing: God draws close to the believer when he suffers for the cause of Christ. In fact, God's presence is so near and dear it is called "*the spirit of glory and of God*" which rest upon the suffering believer.

- c. To know Christ is to be made conformable to His death. Jesus Christ subjected Himself totally to God. He put his own flesh and desires to death; He did only what God willed and desired. Even when He died, His flesh did not desire to die, but nevertheless... Paul sought to be conformed to the death of Christ. He sought to subject himself totally to God—to put his flesh and desires to death and to do only the will and desire of God.

(3:11) 5. Paul sought an eternal experience with Christ: he sought to be resurrected from the dead. The words "*if by any means*" are not expressing doubt and uncertainty. Paul was not questioning the resurrection nor if he would be resurrected. Paul was simply saying what he had already stated (v7-11). He uses all he is and has—all the means at his disposal—for this one great purpose: to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Paul knew that he might die soon, but he had faith that he would be raised to life again. His death would not terrorize him. This was an opportunity for a richer and fuller life with Christ. Paul focused on knowing Christ in every way.

Philippians 3:12-14 Focus On the Goal

3:12 HAVE NOT ATTAINED:

When Christ saved Paul, that was just the beginning, not the end. He had been saved to live for Christ and to serve Christ, and as long as he was on this earth he was going to live for Christ and do all he could to serve Christ. Paul did not count himself as having yet attained. He was not yet perfect. He had made great progress in Christlikeness, but the goal is still before him and not behind him. The goal absorbed all his energy; this is an example of us. We should not let anything take our eyes off our goal—Christ!

1. Paul followed after perfection, after his God-given purpose. The word "*follow after*" (*dioko*) means to press; to pursue just like a runner in a race. There is no such thing as a genuine believer sitting still after he has been saved. The believer must not...
 - a. become comfortable, complacent, lethargic, or lazy.
 - b. waste time and lose opportunity.
 - c. Begin to think he is safe and secure forever; therefore, he can sometimes do what he likes and give into his own desires.

The believer must follow, run, and press after perfection—the perfection for which Christ has saved him. The believer must be active in living for Christ. Paul is encouraged, not discouraged, as he keeps up the chase in pursuit of the goal. Christ had laid hold of Paul on the Road to Damascus, and Paul's desire is to lay hold of Christ's purpose for his life. God desires to reveal His Son in Paul (Gal.1:16). Therefore, Paul ran the race to grab hold of the one who grabbed hold of Him at salvation. If there is no following after Christ, no desire to gain Christ, to lose for Christ, to die for Christ, then there is no relationship with Christ.

3:13 HAVE NOT APPREHENDED:

2. Paul does not want the Christians at Philippi to believe false doctrine, so he strongly repeats what has been said:
 - a. ¹He has not reached the place of completion of the race, the goal, but he's running to it, and the goal is Christ. The finish of the race is death and the reward is the resurrection.
 - i. Paul had reason to feel guilty: he held the coats of those who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Act 7:57, 58). We have all done things for which we are ashamed and we all live in the tension of what we had been and what we want to be. It is especially difficult if others are not forgiving and willing to let the believer put his failure behind him.
 - ii. ²Some of the Christians in Philippi said that they were already perfect. They denied that people need discipline in the Christian life. But Paul himself had not completely succeeded in the work that Christ had given him to do. And Paul knew that. He had only one aim. He uses the picture of a runner in a race. The runner must not look behind him. So Paul must not look back to his old life before he became a Christian. He must forget all his past failures and successes. He must not allow them to affect what he thought or did now. He must not lose his courage or become satisfied with himself. A runner makes every effort to look ahead. And he runs straight towards the line at the end of the race. Paul was making every effort to become perfect, that is, being mature as a Christian.
 - b. Paul worked at forgetting the past. "*This one thing I do. This is the single common denominator and sum of my life. I press for the greater and forget the lesser. I don't allow myself to be sidetracked from the goal and the prize so whatever attempts to infringe itself upon me to stop or to hinder me I forget it.*"
 - i. It's good to forget all that hinders and to remember all that helps.
 - ii. But note: Paul tells us how to deal with the past. How? By concentrating and controlling the mind and by reaching forth to those things which are before us. In one focused act, we are to forget and reach and the press (putting your back into it to go forward).

3:14 I PRESS TOWARD:

3. Paul pressed on toward the goal, toward God's purpose in Christ Jesus. And the purpose is to be conformed to the image of Christ—to be perfect even as He is perfect.
 - i. A runner who reached the line at the end of the race received a reward from the judge. After the race, the judge 'called up' the runner to receive his prize. Paul's prize when he has finished his 'race' of faith will be with Christ. It is compared to no other reward received.
 - ii. Note it is the high calling of God or the upward calling. It was a call from heaven and a call to heaven; to be like Christ and some day to be with Christ. God will call him to enjoy the glory of heaven for ever.

Philippians 3:15-16 Focus On Christian Living

3:15 SPIRITUALLY MATURE:

Paul is saying, as many as are spiritually mature and full grown. The word "*perfect*" speaks of spiritual maturity; having our minds on what Christ has done at the cross, not of sinless perfection. And even if you think you are perfect, "*God shall reveal even this unto you.*" There are three stages of perfection:

¹ <http://www.fotbc.org/commentary/50philippians.htm>

² <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/philippians-lbw.htm>

1. First, there is positional perfection or justification (Heb.10:14; Col.2:10).
2. Secondly, there is progressive perfection, or sanctification (2Corth.7:1; Eph.4:11-12; Gal.3:3).
3. Thirdly, there is ultimate perfection in heaven or glorification (Eph.5:27; 1Jh.3:1-2).

The Philippians were not all mature; some were satisfied with low attainment and others with a medium attainment. But Paul says God will reveal this to them. God will not let the genuine believer rest unless his mind is on righteousness and purity. God pricks our hearts, and reveals that we are falling and coming short. God stirs us to get our minds back upon living like we should—upon pressing for perfection.

3:16 NEVERTHELESS, HOLD TRUE:

The word "*attained*", which appears in verse 12, is the same rule that we applied in verse 15. Paul is using 2 different Greek words. In verse 12, the word attained means—to take hold of something, whereas in verse 16, it refers to—arriving at a specific point, progress, if you please. Paul maintained the growth he had already achieved. Too many live up and down lives. We gain some discipline and some growth, then before too long, we slip right back. There are interruptions and the "*new man*" and "*new growth*" are forsaken and we slip back into being the "*old man*", living just like we used to live. We need to continue in the same straight path in which we have been walking, guided by the same divine truths and the unchanging principles of faith. We need to hold on to what we have and then strive to go higher.

SUMMARY:

All these great birth privileges/human advantages and achievements Paul had gained: Circumcision, an Israelite, a Benjamite, a Pharisee, having Zeal, and Blameless, Paul counted as loss. Paul could consider the loss of all things utterly worthless. He explains to the Philippians that in giving up on the boasts of the flesh, they will all, in fact, "*gain Christ*." The reason for devaluing all things was the surpassing value of experiencing a relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul knew that when he accepted Christ that he would be considered a traitor by the unbelieving Jews. After which, he began to receive the persecution he had once dealt out to others. Paul suffered the loss of all things to gain Christ is the ultimate purpose of that loss. Now Paul says, I am now "*found in Him*" with a different righteousness; righteousness is now through his faith in Christ; righteousness comes from God based on faith.

We need to know "*Him*", not just know about "*Him*." It is His love in our personal relationship that transforms and empowers us. Paul's earnest desire was to know the power of Christ's resurrection; know the fellowship of his sufferings; and become conformed to Christ's death. He wanted to experience all parts of the Christ-life. Jesus said, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it*" Matt.16:24-25 (NIV). And lastly, to attain to the resurrection from the dead, meaning, Paul's hope was that he would rise again after his death; his focus was on eternal gain.

There was no question about his direction. Paul knew that he had not yet become perfect, that is, mature as a Christian, but he was following after, pressing on to take hold of that which Christ took hold of. Christ called us in the first place so we could enjoy eternal life with Him. We must want with all our hearts what He wants for us. Jesus said, "*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God*" Lk.9:62 (NIV). It is the same in a race. Looking back slows you down and takes your mind off the goal. Some Christians fall because they keep looking back at the appeal of the old life. Some look back at friendships they lost by becoming Christians. Some keep mentally revisiting the sorrow of their past sins, burdened down unnecessarily by guilt which Christ has already cleansed. Jesus does not want us to live that way. Paul used terms as forgetting, reaching, and press. Everything behind us is worthless compared to what God offers. As we leave the past behind, but at the same time reaching forth to the things before us, we gain ground. The goal is the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus which can only be obtained by pressing toward the mark; really focusing on the goal, who is Christ, for life. It's all about his life being yours.

Paul leaves them with an exhortation—those that were mature were to have the same mind and if they have already attained this, well live it, otherwise, God would reveal and make clear if they are not. Knowing Christ is the focus for life. That would truly be the goal to apprehend. That goal will draw us into a closer Christian lifestyle for living. Living to gain the prize has eternal benefits. As we pursue, we trust, and mature daily.

APPLICATION:

What have you given up and what are you still doing to keep Christ in your life?