

The Goal of Christian Living

Philippians 3:10-14

Philippians 3:10-14: *“...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.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,¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Background Notes

When Paul wrote this letter, he would have loved to visit Philippi and spend time with the believers - not only because he enjoyed their fellowship, but also to teach them, to answer their questions and to help them settle their problems. But Paul could not visit Philippi. He was a prisoner in Rome because of his Christian faith and testimony.

After his third missionary journey Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, and for two years he was imprisoned in Caesarea, on the coast of Israel. Because his legal situation seemed to be at a standstill, Paul appealed his case to Caesar, so he had to travel to Rome and await his trial there. After about two years under house arrest in Rome, Paul was tried and acquitted - a great answer to prayer!

While he was awaiting trial, he was allowed to live in his own rented house. He could hold Bible studies with anyone who came to visit him, he could witness to the Roman soldiers who guarded him, and he could write letters. Acts 28:30-31: *“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”*

When he wrote this letter to the believers in Philippi, one of Paul’s concerns was the danger of false teaching. False teaching had not penetrated the church at Philippi, but it was around. Paul was concerned that it could influence and distort sound doctrine, so he wrote to warn the Philippians of the dangers of false teaching.

In the first half of chapter 3, Paul warned the Philippian believers to be aware of the false teaching of Judaism. The influence of that “works”-oriented false teaching could distort the teaching of the proper goal of Christian living and the truth of the divine method for sanctification.

Some Judaizers thought that they could actually attain spiritual perfection in this lifetime! In these verses Paul showed that it is not possible to gain perfection in this life - even for a dedicated Christian. Such false teaching distorts the goal of Christian living.

Doctrinal Points

1. There is a present goal for the Christian.

What is our present goal? Is it Christian service? No. Christian service is good, but it is not the *goal* for a Christian. Is it spiritual experiences? No. Spiritual experiences can be encouraging, but they are not the *goal* of the Christian life.

The present goal for the Christian is to **know Christ** - *“that I may know Him” (v10)*. You might say, “I thought Paul knew Christ at this point! He was a Christian, wasn’t he?” Of course he was – he had met the Lord on the Damascus road. So Paul knew the Lord, but his goal in life as a Christian was to **know the Lord more**. The apostle Paul wanted to know the Lord Jesus Christ more and more, in an ever-deepening relationship.

Is that your present goal as a Christian? It should be. Christian experiences and Christian service will all fall into the right place if we make our present goal to know Christ more.

How do we get to know the Lord more? The same way you get to know a personal friend better - you spend time with them. You communicate with them, and you keep the lines of communication open. In the same way, we keep the lines of communication with the Lord open through lots of Scripture, so He can speak to us, and through lots of prayer, when we speak to the Lord.

In the rest of verse 10, Paul elaborated on three key areas of Christian experience. We need to practice these areas if we really want to know the Lord more.

a. We need to practice the power of His resurrection.

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection” (v10). Have you experienced the resurrection power of our Lord in your life as a Christian? That power is available to live our lives as Christians.

Ephesians 1:19-20 says, *“And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.”* The amazing power that raised Christ from the dead is available to us! That power is available to strengthen us as Christians, to resolve differences between brothers and sisters, to strengthen us to do the right thing, to strengthen us to work out marriage and family problems – to strengthen us to cope with any need we have.

Do you know the Lord more in this area? Have you experienced His resurrection power?

b. We need to practice the fellowship of His suffering.

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings” (v10). “The fellowship of His sufferings” is not referring to the Lord’s sufferings on the cross for our sins. The sufferings of the atonement are over. The “fellowship of His suffering” refers to our willingness to participate in suffering for the sake of Christ - fellowship with Him in suffering.

A husband and wife get to know one another more as they suffer through trials together. In the same way, we will get to know the Lord in an ever-deepening relationship as we walk with Him through the trials and sufferings that He allows to come into our lives.

c. We need to practice being conformed to His death.

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” Did Paul mean that he literally wanted to be a martyr - to conform to the Lord’s death in that way? Maybe, but I believe he meant the *“death to self-principle”* that we all need to practice if we want to know Christ more. That’s what our Lord meant when He called us to *“take up the cross daily”* - to die to self, follow Him, and live for Him.

Galatians 2:20 says, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* If we practice being “conformed to His death” more, we will get to know Him more.

In verse 11, Paul said, *“...if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”* This is not an expression of doubt - Paul knew that he would be resurrected. His point here was that he wanted to practice the goal of Christian living consistently - all the way through his life, whether he lived until the Lord returned or died before the Lord returned.

Is our present goal of Christian living to know Him more, by knowing the power of His resurrection? To fellowship with Him in suffering? By knowing what it means to be conformed to His death? There is a present goal for the Christian – to know Christ more!

2. There is a future prize for the Christian.

Verse 14: *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* Notice - there is a difference between the goal and the prize. What is that prize? Is it salvation? No, we start the Christian life with guaranteed salvation. Is it our upward call home to Heaven (v14)? I don’t think that’s the idea. I think the “upward call” is not our call home to Heaven, but rather the “heavenly calling” that’s mentioned in Hebrews 3:1: *“...partakers of the heavenly calling.”*

What then is the prize of our heavenly calling? Look at verse 12, *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on.”* That’s the prize – to fully know the Lord, and be “perfected” - fully conformed to the image of Christ. Paul was saying that he hadn’t yet attained the present goal of knowing the Lord fully, and he wasn’t yet fully conformed to the image of Christ.

That prize is future. We don’t attain that prize in this lifetime. At the resurrection, we will receive new bodies - bodies that are free from sin. Think of how well we’ll be able to know and appreciate the Lord when we’re perfected! What a wonderful prize!

Remember, this prize of glorified sin-free bodies and fully knowing the Lord and being fully conformed to His image is future. In the meantime, during this life, we **press on!** We will not be “perfected” in this lifetime; it’s part of the future prize. But we can press on toward the prize.

As Hosea 6:3 says, *“Let us press on to know the Lord.”* There is a future prize for the Christian.

Practical Application

Make a fresh start every day!

Verse 13: *“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.”*

By “forgetting the past,” Paul did not mean that he obliterated his memory, or he forgot to pay his debts or correct his mistakes. No - that would be bad interpretation of Scripture. What he meant was that he was not going to let his past failures demoralize him, and he was not going to “rest on his laurels” of present accomplishments. Like a runner, he was going to press on – to make a fresh new start every day!

We need to make a fresh start every day. Don’t rest on your past achievements as a Christian, because you can never say you’ve “arrived” in this lifetime. A Christian man once told me that he didn’t sin much anymore, and he actually expected to be sinless within a year or two! Can you believe it? I asked him, “What about the great sin of pride, of bragging that you’re almost sinless?” He got mad - and exhibited the sin of anger.

We will never be perfect in this lifetime, so don’t rest on your laurels on the one hand, and don’t get discouraged and demoralized on the other hand. **Press on!** Make a fresh start every day. As Paul said, *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on....”* God had a plan for Paul’s life. Paul wanted to lay hold of that plan and fulfill it. He didn’t want to get bogged down by looking back. He pressed on!

This should be true in our lives, too. Don’t look back. Keep pressing on. Make a fresh start every day!