

PRESSING ON TO THE UPWORD CALL

INTRODUCTION

A fictitious man comes to see me. He seems broken and humble. He says, "Pastor Jim, I have a confession to make. I have sinned against you." The man with great contriteness confesses his sin and is genuinely sorry and repentant. I forgive him. Leaving my office, he asks, "Are we OK now?" And I answer, "Of course, let's leave the past behind and move on."

As we approach the New Year, we often see the same verse quoted, "Let us 'forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead.'"¹ Is that wise? Is that a correct understanding of Paul's assertion in Philippians 3?

I would suggest not. But what Paul does say in Philippians 3:13–14 (ESV) is an important message for this time of year. He writes,

"¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

If Paul is NOT saying that we should ignore past failures and sins and move on, then what is he saying? To understand that we cannot wrest these verses from the context.

CONTEXT

Paul is concluding his letter to the Philippians where he was addressing a number of issues, not the least of them was encouraging them in their progress as believers. ("*Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,*" (Philippians 1:25, ESV)) In Chapter 3 he warns them about Judiazers who are persuading them to be real Jews; but Paul argues that he and the believers in Christ are real Jews. One of the characteristics of a real Jew is that "put no confidence in the flesh."²

Paul then shows that if anyone has any right to place their confidence in the flesh, he does. He lists a litany of reasons why he is the perfect Jew, in the flesh. But then he affirms that entire resume is worthless compared to the worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord (v.7). Rather than his resume of accomplishments, his confidence comes from Christ and Christ's accomplishments which are Paul's by faith alone. This goal of being found in Christ is not only based upon justification by faith alone, but by Paul's sincere efforts of knowing Christ in his daily life, plus experiencing His resurrection power and

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 3:13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 3:3). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

dying to sin and self. It is in these things that Paul has confidence to attain the resurrection of the dead and be with Christ.

Paul admits he's not there yet. Perfection in Paul's mind means completely knowing Christ, complete victory of sin and self; and being forever with Christ. He's not there yet. But he says, "I press on to make that experience my own." It is then that Paul qualifies any accusation of self-effort. He can confidently press on in these things because he is certain that "Christ has made him, His own."

TEXT

It is with all this background that we come to our text: *"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 3:13–14, ESV)

EXPOSITION

So, we ask Paul some questions.

1. What haven't you made your own, Paul? Answer: Perfection. Or another word is glorification. He doesn't completely know Christ yet. He hasn't experienced complete victory of sin and self. And He hasn't received the resurrection of the dead.
2. What do you forget what lies behind, Paul? Answer: (Not his failures) His accomplishments! Or in his words: his "gains". Paul found no joy, no confidence, no rest in his successes, his abilities, his achievements.
3. What are you hoping for, living for, pressing on for, Paul? In his words, *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (v.14). Paul views his life as a call – a God-call. And the call is to share in the eternal Presence of Christ. That's his goal.

APPLICATION

Verse 13 has absolutely nothing to do with not dwelling on past sins and failures and moving into the New Year with a new confidence. Verse 13 and 14 are all about recognizing that the "your best life now" does not compare to you're the life to come – if you have placed your faith in the accomplishments of Christ and you are striving to take hold of what He has already taken hold for you.

This singular and passionate focus on the future glorification of the Christian, which Paul clearly intends to be an example to us all, often gets lost in the church—for a whole variety of reasons, one of them is that we are often busy with our own lives, our families and indeed our own walk with Christ. But a careful study of the Scriptures never sets present activity and preoccupation

with the future at odds with each other. “Indeed, the summary accounts recorded in Hebrews 11 make it clear that the notable saints mentioned all gained their power to act meaningfully in the present precisely from their orientation toward the future.”³

So, as you face turns toward another year, the Scriptures invite you not to rest on last year’s successes and achievements. They are pale in comparison to the glory that will be revealed at the coming of Christ. So, press on to take hold of what is already yours.

³ The Christian Counselor's Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling (Jay Adams Library) by Jay E. Adams, Zondervan