



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Pressing On to Spiritual Maturity—Philippians 3.12-16

APRIL 25, 2011

PHILIPPIANS: CULTIVATING A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE AT THE CAPITOL

Don Garner / PO Box 302703, Austin, TX 78703 / don.garner@capitolcom.org www.capitolcom.org

INTRODUCTION

Self-improvement is now a multi-billion dollar industry. There is a cacophony of voices in modern media and publishing that exhort you to grow, expand, learn, develop—to broaden your horizons, to reach for the stars. Relentless attempts are made to pressure you to make constant improvements to your diet, your physique, your marriage, your love-making, your communications, your leadership skills, your parenting, your career management, your investment portfolio, and so on, and so on. At first blush, Paul's exhortation to press toward the goal, delivered to Philippian believers two millennia ago seems to fit the modern self-help craze of our narcissistic culture.

Unfortunately, many of the leading voices in the Christian community in America would go no deeper than the average humanist in the interpretation or the application of Paul's words in the passage we will consider this week. An uplifting speech on the necessity of goal setting and dreaming big dreams would be standard employment of a passage like this in many pulpits across the country. We will hope to go much deeper here to rightly understand the eternal principles offered in a passage that is truly a summit in Paul's writing.

The zeal of evangelicals in modern times would seem, to more serious followers of Christ, to be zeal without knowledge. Is contemporary Christianity producing clouds without rain, trees without fruit, shallow and selfish professors of an empty creed? Could it be that the Christianized self-help teaching of many contemporary churches is producing adult babies in regards to spiritual maturity. Are we witnessing the devaluing of maturity and the celebration of childishness among Christians today?

From Paul's exhortation, we will draw out the following three imperatives regarding spiritual maturity:

- I. Realize God isn't finished with you yet
- II. Press on toward God's goals for you
- III. Work together toward spiritual growth

Philippians 3.12-16—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. 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, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

I. REALIZE GOD ISN'T FINISHED WITH YOU YET

“Not that I have already attained or am already perfected...” says Paul, and then, “I do not count myself to have apprehended.” Paul makes it clear that he realizes that God is not finished with him yet—He understands that he has not crossed the finish line in regards to knowing Christ and being conformed to His likeness. He is not boasting. He is not condoning complacency or apathy.

He is making a humble admission that there is work to do on his character. Reviewing his controlling passion to know Christ in every way, he is reminded of how far short of the goal he truly is. There is something still to attain, things in his character to be perfected, and something to apprehend in his pursuit of the knowledge of Christ. He is not what he knows he should be, what he needs to be, what he longs to be—but there is hope yet.

BIBLE STUDIES (MEALS PROVIDED)

LEGISLATORS ONLY: WEDNESDAY @ LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30A.M. OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS LATER)
OR THURSDAYS @ 7:30 A.M. IN THE MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY (ALL ARE WELCOME): FRIDAY @ 8:00AM IN THE MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

Pressing On to Spiritual Maturity—Philippians 3.12-16

II. PRESS ON TOWARDS GOD’S GOAL FOR YOU

Paul’s letter took on a biographical tone at the beginning of this chapter and continues through these verses. After admitting that he has not attained, been perfected, or apprehended, he now speaks of his ongoing quest for spiritual growth. “I press on!” declares Paul. “One thing I do...” “Reaching forward...I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” These phrases sound a crescendo of passionate dedication to God’s purpose of bringing Paul to maturity in Christ.

You were warned in the previous passage against spiritual self-reliance or “confidence in the flesh” in establishing your standing before God. Paul urges you to trust only in the finished work of Christ for standing and acceptance with God. Yet, you are not to be passive. You must press on to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of you. You must reach forward to those things which are ahead. You must press toward the goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.

This is a clarion call to active, intentional, dedicated, and focused action on your part. To what end is this effort to be directed? Why has Christ laid hold of you? What are those things which are ahead? What is the goal towards which you must press on? The work of Christ which laid hold of you calls you to dedicate yourself to his purposes in doing so. While many statements of God’s purpose in redeeming us could be offered here, what does the immediate context indicate? It seems clear that growing in the righteousness and knowledge of Christ are what Paul has in mind. Spiritual maturity is God’s goal for you and me.

III. WORK TOGETHER TOWARD SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Paul goes on to encourage the spiritually mature to hold to this understanding of God’s goal of spiritual growth for all believers. If anyone sees it otherwise, God will, in time, bring them to see it as Paul does. The more mature among any group of believers are to help to establish an atmosphere for spiritual growth. Believers are to unite around the common goal of growth in the righteousness and knowledge of Christ. A false standard or rule was being proposed by Judaizers as to what people were to strive for in the practice of their faith. Rather than the measure being adherence to the Mosaic law, Paul urges them to apply one standard—Christ!

CONCLUSION

Many today are passionate about self-improvement. They strive ardently toward clearly defined goals. Many are inspired by the hope of the perfectly sculptured body, the ideal weight, a balanced portfolio, a dream home, their next promotion, and so on and so on. What drives you? What are you pressing toward?

Paul’s burning desire was to know Christ. He devoted himself to growing in the knowledge of Christ and in His likeness.

- What are the overarching priorities of your life? (consider your schedule and your bank statements as indicators)
- What active, intentional, dedicated, and focused actions indicate that you are pressing on toward spiritual maturity?
- How could you press on, reach forward, or press toward the goal of spiritual maturity?