

Pressing On – Philippians 3:12-16

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Read Vs.

B. Link to Last Week

1. These vs. continue vs. 1-11 & what we looked at last week, so let's do a quick recap.
2. Paul warned the Philippians to beware of legalists who would try to move them from trusting in the grace of God to their own efforts.
 - a. There were false teachers called **Judaizers** who followed Paul around, sneaking into the churches he planted **after** he left.
 - b. They told new believers Paul's Gospel was as **start**, but if they wanted to really please God they had to keep the Jewish Law.
 - c. They enforced a long list of **rules** that shifted dependence on God's grace to works.
3. So Paul gives an eloquent defense of grace in vs. 7-9.
4. He knew how the legalists would respond. Paul had **often** heard the come-back of his critics who said his **emphasis** of grace would cause people to get spiritually lazy.
 - a. They claimed only by enforcing the rule of works would people endeavor to be holy.
 - b. They thought preaching grace would lead to a immorality & a spiritual immaturity.
5. So having defended the Gospel of Grace, Paul followed it up with what grace **really** does.
6. Far from leading to spiritual laziness, grace produces a **holy ambition** to be like Jesus.
7. Paul describes what God's grace had done **in him** ...

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 10-11

¹⁰ 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.

1. Paul had a deep & abiding passion to not just know **about** God; he yearned for a close relationship **with** Him.
2. He'd responded to Jesus' invitation to **follow Him**, not at a distance but as close as possible.
3. Paul understood being a Christian meant much more than agreeing to a list of doctrines.
 - a. It was a **way of life**,
 - b. Made possible by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.
4. The more Paul grew in his relationship of Christ, the more he **wanted** to grow.
5. Far from grace making him lazy, the more grace he experienced, the more he loved & served the Lord.
6. An the more he grew in grace, the **farther** he realized he had to go. Look

B. Vs. 12-14

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.

1. As spiritually advanced as Paul was, he was still a **work in progress**.
 - a. He still fell. There were lapses in judgment; times when the flesh got the best of him.
 - b. As godly as he was, there were areas of holiness he struggled with.
 - c. Paul had to do what all of us do, repent & confess sin.
2. He wasn't perfect! // This side of heaven, no one is.
3. As long as we are in these bodies, living in a sin-cursed world, we'll stumble & fall.
4. We'll go through the process of repentance & forgiveness again & again.
5. Paul's admission here should be an encouragement to all of us.
 - a. When reading his letters it's easy to get the impression he lived on a spiritual plane unlike anything we could aspire to.
 - b. He wrote **THIS** to disabuse us of that thought.
 - c. Certainly his **calling** was unique.
 - d. His **background** gave him a unique perspective.
 - e. But when it came to the core realities of following Jesus, he was no different than us.
 - f. He struggled with temptation just like we do.
 - g. So we have a lot to learn from him.

6. Note his attitude toward the things he **still struggled with**.
 - a. He didn't get discouraged & think of quitting.
 - b. He didn't throw up his hands in frustration that after 30 years of walking with the Lord he still messed up.
7. On the contrary, he says,
I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.
8. He wasn't perfect, but instead of using that as an excuse to **stay broken**, he used it as a goad to move **toward** perfection.
 - a. Usually someone will say, "No one's perfect," as **an excuse** for sin.
 - b. Indeed No one **is** perfect.
 - c. But perfection is the ultimate promise of the believer.
 - d. We **ought** to move ever toward it.
9. That was Paul's perspective. He wanted to **lay hold of** everything faith in Jesus meant.
10. Picture a father who reaches down & lifts his little child up to a shelf covered with treasure.
 - a. That's the idea here.
 - b. Paul has been laid hold of by God for something marvelous.
 - c. So Paul doesn't want to leave his hands hanging idly at his sides.
 - d. He wants to grab all God is holding him for.
11. Christ laid hold of **you for a reason**.
 - a. God desires to do a marvelous work **both in & through** you.
 - b. Jesus didn't save you just to make you part of a **crowd**.
 - c. He laid hold of you because you have a unique role to play.
 - d. Your potential & destiny are mind-bendingly glorious!
 - e. God's got you in His grip, so reach out & lay hold of all He has for you.
- ¹³ Brethren,
12. See? Paul doesn't a super-spiritual status **above** them; he's one of them.
13. What he's about to say isn't just for super-saints. This ought to be the attitude of **all** of us.
 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.
14. Paul knows there's a great goal to life, a glorious purpose behind it all.
15. The predominant religion of our time is Secular Humanism which says there's no meaning or purpose to life, not goal to aim at.
 - a. We're all just biological machines that came about by chance.
 - b. Molecules banged around together in space, made a gas-cloud that condensed into a planet just the right distance from a medium-sized star for liquid water to form.
 - c. Eventually some chemicals formed that combined to produce life.
 - d. Billions of years later homo sapiens formed brains big enough to figure out where they came from.
 - e. An now we know we're nothing more than a freakish combination of chemicals.
 - f. We're born, we live, we die – nothing more.
15. That's what the philosophy of materialism & secular humanism believe.
16. But everything inside us **KNOWS intuitively** that's **bunk**.
 - a. We can't escape the sense there's a goal & purpose to life.
 - b. We possess an inner moral compass that tells us if we're headed in the right direction.
 - c. Life isn't just a long succession of days from birth to death.
 - d. We're consumed w/the sense our days **ought to be spent in the pursuit of something**.
17. That something, is a SomeOne **God**.
18. The theologian Augustine said, "Our heart is restless until it finds its rest in You, O God."
19. The problem is, sin **separated** God & man.
 - a. The Fall in Eden sidetracked our hearts.
 - b. Mankind has lost its way.
20. Jesus came to heal the breach & remove the barrier between God & man.
21. He restores us to the goal & purpose of life – to know & love Him.

22. Now that Paul had been saved, he made it his aim to reach that goal with a single-minded determination.
23. He was all about ONE THING. But that 1 thing has 2 parts . . .
- 1) He forsakes what's behind – and -
 - 2) He presses on to what's ahead.
24. **First:** He forsakes what's behind.
- 13 - forgetting those things which are behind
- a. Behind Paul lay **both success & failure**.
 - b. Last week in vs. 4-6, Paul gave a list of his credentials, things the legalists considered bragging points.
 - c. But Paul said he counted them as **refuse** compared to trusting Christ.
 - d. Not only did he forsake his accomplishments **before** coming to Christ, he didn't hang on to all he'd done **FOR** Christ -
 - 1) The churches he'd planted,
 - 2) The people he'd won to faith,
 - 3) The letters he'd written that were being used far & wide as tools for growing in Faith.
 - e. Next to Jesus, Paul is the most prominent figure in the NT. His was an **epic life**!
 - f. But as he penned this to the Philippians from imprisonment in Rome, he wasn't resting on his laurels.
 - g. He looked at each new day as an opportunity to **start all over again** in giving all he had to know, love & serve God.
25. People who've walked with God for years can be tempted to look back with pride at all they've done for God.
- a. They may say, "Wow, look how **far** I've come!"
 - b. It becomes easy to add, "I think I've come **far enough**! I'll camp here till Jesus comes back."
26. That wasn't Paul's mindset. "Far enough" for him was heaven.
27. He wasn't going to let past **failures** hinder him either.
- a. He knew the past can't be changed but it can be forgiven.
 - b. Because God forgets what He forgives, Paul made a decision to forget it as well.
 - c. He couldn't erase it from his memory, but he wouldn't allow past failures to affect him.
28. Many are hindered from moving forward by their past.
- a. They made a good start with Christ years ago, then did something foolish & think God has cast them off.
 - b. Paul could have thought that.
 - 1) He'd led the **persecution** of the followers of Jesus & presided at the **murder** of some.
 - 2) If anyone could think he'd blown it with God it was Paul.
 - c. But because he understood the greatness of God's grace he put the past behind him & made it his aim to press in to a great knowledge & love of Christ.
29. Christian, don't dwell on the past! Ask God to forgive, then forget it!
- a. Each day that dawns is another gift He gives to live w/o the limitations of the past.
 - b. You don't need therapy. You need to believe God when He says His forgives you.
 - c. His grace is sufficient for you TODAY!
30. **Second:** Paul reached forward toward all God had in store for him.
- a. Grace not only frees us from the past,
 - b. It fills the future with good.
31. That phrase "reaching forward" in v. 13 is what the runner does in a race.
- a. As he/she nears the finish line, they lean forward to shave another thousandth of a second off their time.
 - b. It's a picture of **all out effort**.
32. Paul didn't have a laid back, casual attitude about following Christ. He was all out, all the time.
33. When Julius Caesar landed on the shores of Britain with his Roman legions, he took a bold step to ensure the success of his military venture.
- a. He ordered his men to halt on the cliffs overlooking the galleys that had carried them from Gaul lying just offshore.
 - b. As the legionnaires watched, they saw the ships erupt in flames.

- c. Caesar had given the order for them to be torched, cutting off any possibility of retreat.
- d. There was nothing left for the legion to do but to advance & conquer.
- e. That's exactly what they did.

34. The path God has ordained for us is **forward**, not back.

C. Vs. 15-16

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

- 1. Paul urges the spiritually mature to make sure they don't grow complacent.
- 2. Some of older believers are like Dorothy & her companions in the *Wizard of Oz* when they crossed the poppy field.
 - a. We've come a long way & overcome many obstacles on our way to the Kingdom of God.
 - b. But now that we're in sight of it we've grown drowsy.
 - c. Instead of pressing on to the heavenly city, we've lain down to a spiritual nap.
 - d. That's a dangerous place. Get up & press on!

3. I love what Paul says here in v. 16. To the degree you've already attained, **double it**.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Press On!

1. Some years ago, columnist Herb Caen wrote,
Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up.

It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed.

Every morning a lion wakes up.

It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death.

It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle;

when the sun comes up, you'd better be running.

- 2. James says the devil is like a lion on the prowl, seeking whom he may devour.
- 3. The best way to avoid the danger of the one who seeks to destroy you is to be pressing on after Christ.

B. Fallen

1. Raymond Buker was in the 1924 Olympic Games, the same Olympics where Eric Liddell made his mark on athletic history, as portrayed in the movie *Chariots of Fire*.

2. A year before the Olympics, Buker was running in a mile race with Joey Ray and Ray Watson; 2 well known milers of the time.

3. Prior to that race, Ray & Watson both had better times in the mile than Buker.

4. But Buker thrived on competition & had never raced with someone of the caliber of these 2.

5. During the 2nd lap, while they were all together, Buker got knocked down.

- a. He didn't know how it happened, but all of a sudden he was on the track.

- b. For 2 or 3 seconds he couldn't think.

6. He got up, looked ahead to the other runners & had a split second to decide if he was going to quit or keep running. He decided to finish the race.

7. All he could think was, "I must keep going, even if I come in last; I must not quit."

8. So he took off once again, & guess what—he not only finished, he won!

9. Maybe you've fallen! Maybe your spiritual legs got knocked out from underneath you or you stumbled on some moral tripwire.

10. Stop looking at the past. You're not disqualified because of it.

11. Get back in the race – Press on!