

Good habits for Christians **Philippians 3:13 – 15 - Press to the goal**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

This talk, entitled: 'Press to the goal,' is the last talk of the present series, which is termed 'Good habits for Christians.' What we shall say today is based on and emerges from what the Bible says in Philippians chapter 3 verses 13 – 15. I shall now read those verses from The Authorised King James Version:

"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. 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."

There are two major points that Paul makes immediately.

First of all, he admits that he doesn't fully understand all the implications of everything that he has ever encountered. Secondly, neither has he fully understood everything that's happened to him personally, in his very full, eventful life. He says, 'I count not myself to have apprehended.' That's a very good sign of modesty and wisdom for a start. We do well if we learn to follow such a good example.

He follows that immediately by saying, 'One thing I do.' Now, that's an excellent trigger to prompt the thoughts of anyone who reads their Bible regularly. What did he mean when he said that? 'One thing I do.' Of all the experiences and lessons of the life that he had undergone, of all the many things that had penetrated and impressed his mind and heart, one thing had so impressed him to the point where nothing else compared with it. Relatively, it had blotted everything else out of his memory.

That was as to the past. But what about the future? He was just as clear about the future as he was about the past. There was placed within him, an object, an ambition, something to aim at, which, more than anything else, had outweighed anything that had occurred in the past. There can be no doubt about the kind of man that Paul was. Once he had made his mind up about anything, there was no deflecting him from what he had decided and what he had committed himself to. Knowing that, we need not be surprised that immediately after his conversion to Christ, as recorded in Acts 9, he turned round completely, and forever more. It was no mere flash in the pan.

Read the scriptures that refer to Saul of Tarsus, who became so very well known as the apostle Paul after he trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour and confessed Him as Lord. Study particularly those scriptures that were written by him. We cannot escape the conclusion that he was a most intense person. He truly believed that he should throw himself whole heartedly; lock, stock and barrel; in for a penny, in for a pound; with total, wholehearted commitment; into

whatever activity he believed was right in the sight of God. Before his conversion to Christianity, he had been determined, as an ultra orthodox Jew, and as far as he could, to expose Christians as heretics, and to have them at the very least persecuted and put in prison (see Acts chapter 9 verses 1 and 2, and chapter 26 verses 9 – 11). However, as soon as he became a Christian, he threw himself just as wholeheartedly into living the Christian life, and preaching the Christian gospel. He was willing to suffer any amount of painful persecution to himself if it led to souls being saved for Christ. Mind you, Paul was not alone in speaking in such a definite manner.

Joshua said, “Not one thing hath failed” (Joshua chapter 23 verse 14).

David said, “One thing have I desired” (Psalm 27 verse 4).

A blind man to whom Jesus gave sight said, “One thing I know” (John’s Gospel chapter 9 verse 25).

Peter wrote, “Be not ignorant of this one thing” (2 Peter chapter 3 verse 8).

And, of course, The Lord Jesus Himself was not averse to speaking in the same definite manner. In Mark’s Gospel chapter 10 verse 21, He said to an ambitious young man, “One thing thou lackest.” He also said to Martha, “One thing is necessary” (Luke’s Gospel chapter 10 verse 42).

All these incidents emphasised the same point.

But, to return to the matter of the zeal of Paul, it is well worth thinking about what he himself wrote about; what he was aiming at.

It is always worthwhile to see what Paul says about any subject, and, particularly, what he said or wrote about himself. The present subject of ambition we are thinking about is a very good example. It tells us more about what Paul had in mind about himself. It is also an outstanding example for us to follow, if we have already trusted the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, and confessed Him as our Lord.

What does the future hold for us as Christians?

What do we think is appropriate as to our attitude and activities for the future while we wait for the Lord Jesus to come for us and take us to be with Himself? What preparations are we making in view of that day when we shall stand before the Lord Jesus at The Judgment Seat of Christ? He shall then make plain to us His personal, righteous assessment as to what spiritual progress we made since we first became a Christian? We do well to examine ourselves in the light of what a man like Saul of Tarsus, bitterly opposed to the Lord Jesus, changed into as he examined himself as he moved on. He became not only a mere run of the mill Christian, wonderful though that is, but the outstanding apostle Paul, about whom we read so much in The New Testament.

Let us think about how he expressed himself as he meditated on such things. As we said earlier, among other things, he highlighted his personal ambitions. As confessing Christians, we would do very well to place before ourselves what have become tenets of our Christian faith, soundly based on scripture, the Word of God. They give us the appropriate attitude for what, in the proper sense of the word, we should regard as normal ambitions of Christians.

By the way, let me speak a word from my own personal experience. When I was first led to trust the Lord Jesus as my Saviour, my father in the faith was an experienced Christian who brought me to the Lord. After committing me to the Lord’s care, he said, ‘I’m going to give you some good advice which will stand you in good stead, right until the Lord shall come.’ With that, he read to me the exhortation in 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 15:

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

And it wasn't long before he added in similar fashion Second Timothy chapter 3 verses 16 – 17:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

I've never been given better advice in my life. In so saying, Paul himself was led to summarise the value and blessing of regular reading and study of the scriptures.

Happy indeed are we if, and when, these exhortations become our personal aims in the study of the scriptures, the Word of God. They were all written more than about two thousand years ago, and indeed many of them were about a thousand years apart from each other. If we read and study the scriptures day by day, the more it will become plain to us that they blend together, with a consistent message from God to each of us as individuals, and to anyone else who is willing to study them. It is indeed the Word of God.

We have already looked at the connection and mutual help provided by the emphasis through scripture of the phrase 'one thing.'

We do well to look to God to guide us by His Spirit to see what the apostle Paul says of himself; and also the attitude that God had wrought in him in respect of his attitude to the future. He gave him clear guidance as to what he should aim for; that is, his attitude as to how he should spend his life while waiting for the Lord Jesus to come again. The Saviour Who died to save him from the penalty for his sins, will surely come for him, to take him to spend eternity in heaven with all others who have trusted the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour.

Let us look, then, at what scripture records about what were the aims or ambitions of Paul the apostle, and which have been inserted in holy scripture as excellent examples for Christians to follow and apply to their own lives.

That is, the Christian should aim, or 'be ambitious', in these directions: In Romans chapter 15 verses 20 – 21, Paul displays his ambition for himself to preach the Christian gospel. Listen to what he said:

“Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard, shall understand.”

He had no ambition at all to copy what anyone else said or had said. He felt totally committed to preach what God had given him personally to say, and to preach it to whosoever and in whatever places God had given or would give him to preach. Furthermore, we read in Second Corinthians chapter 5 verse 9 of his intense desire to be well pleasing in the sight of God.

“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.”

Then, in First Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 11 – 12, he recommended to his readers what to many would be the hardest thing to covet or practise.

“And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you (that is, while he had been with them); That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.”

In other words, what he aimed for himself, he also coveted for all other Christians, as he says in Philippians chapter 3 verse 15. It is certainly characteristic of Paul that he never recommends or presses on to others what he does not practise himself. A very good principle indeed for any who preach and teach the Word of God, and, indeed, any aspect of life, whether professional, ecclesiastical or even social. But, before he challenges anyone else, he makes plain the task he gives himself in verse 14.

“I press (or pursue) toward the mark (or goal) for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Pursue

This implies the use of energy. There is the recognition of something to be sought out, secured, applied with great diligence, possessed, and enjoyed to the full.

Goal

A goal is something to be secured, possessed, enjoyed. We live in a world filled with many varieties and aspects of sport. Most of them are based upon the presumption that the person or group who secures or scores what they call a goal will have gained intense honour for themselves and their supporters, and experienced great joy, along the way, in achieving it. Such victory demands energy, skill, persistence and above all a desire to be worthy of celebration by those associated with them.

Prize

There is no disgrace in looking upon what we have achieved. Nor is there any fault in our enjoyment of the realization of the joy that flows from the development within us. We are given heartfelt appreciation of the relationship into which we have been brought by simple faith in our Lord and Saviour. The marvel is that we have been given the power within us of the enjoyment of the result of the work of the One who has saved us. At what scripture calls His Appearing, He is going to lead us personally into the universal display of the result of the work that He Himself has done. He will put right what we sinners have put wrong.

Calling

A calling is much more dignified and purposeful than merely drawing someone's attention to what you want them to do. For a start, it implies dignity, possession, position, and association with others in the gaining of it.

On high

On high clearly also implies dignity, selection, honour. The Bible is quite clear. Jesus is coming again for us Christians, that is, we who have trusted Him as our Saviour and have confessed Him as our Lord. When He comes at the Rapture, He will draw us away from this wicked, weary world, and identify us with Himself where He is in heaven where we shall be with Him for evermore. We shall continue to be with Him when He comes in power and great glory at His Appearing.

In Christ Jesus

‘In Christ Jesus.’ This phrase implies both position and honour. It is always used to emphasise our being associated with Him as He is now in heaven. This is not due to any works of righteousness in or by ourselves. It is rather in virtue of our association with the Lord Jesus as He is in heavenly glory now, seated at the right hand of God on high. He is the One in Whom we are acceptable in the sight of God.

We do indeed have a settled relationship with God, but, as we say, not because of any works of righteousness that we have done, but because in His mercy He has sent into the world His well beloved Son, that we might be made righteous in Him. This is because of the value to God of the righteous sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, that we might be saved through Him.

While Paul was still here on earth, he longed for himself and for all believers, what we call 'heavenly blessings.' He went on to summarise the calling of God on High in Christ Jesus. He truly desired that all Christians might fulfil in themselves the achievement of such an ambition, bringing the expression of it to its rightful climax, that is, 'in Christ Jesus.' Again, as with other promises, he traces the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Himself as the origin and fulfilment of all that is worthwhile to strive for. This is achievable, not in our own strength or ability, but as John says in his Gospel in chapter 16 verse 13:

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."

How kind, how gracious, was Paul, to identify us with himself in the fulfilment of these wonderful ambitions in verse 15.

"Let us therefore as many as be perfect (that is, as we have considered, complete) be thus minded."

God grant that it might be so.

Now, there is something that I feel compelled to say before I close. But, first, let me read again Philippians chapter 3 and verse 15:

"Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded."

There is no doubt that many would read the word 'perfect' here as meaning being without any faults at all, and completely incapable of committing any sins. For the moment, let us accept what the Bible scholars tell us. They are confident that the word 'perfect' here could be more exactly and accurately rendered 'complete.' That is, fully equipped to be capable of refuting the attacks of Satan on the negative side and pleasing God on the positive side! The problem of being tempted to think that some are completely without the possibility of their making any mistakes doesn't come into it.

First of all then, what does Paul mean when he speaks about being 'perfect?' For a start, what is our position before a Holy God, and our relationship with Him? Positionally, we Christians are indeed right with God.

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3 verse 5) and because "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and ... he was buried, and ... rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (First Corinthians chapter 15 verses 3 and 4).

A wonderful position indeed to be in, in the sight of a Holy God! In addition to that, God has implanted The Holy Spirit within us, to guide us and empower us to live, act and serve God by that self-same Spirit in a way that is full and complete in the reckoning of God. It would be absolute folly to assume that we are perfect in ourselves. It would be a gross mistake for us to think that we have the power, and self-control, within ourselves, to ensure that we can act, constantly and for ever, in a way that is well pleasing to the God Who has saved us. If we are not careful and diligent, we can give way to the flesh and succumb to the temptations of Satan and act in a way that is undoubtedly sinful in the sight of a holy God. At any moment, it is within us to either act as moved by the Holy Spirit, or respond to the temptations of the devil. The marvel is that as long as we live here in this world, we are indeed capable of resisting the temptations of the devil and pleasing the God Who has saved us. Let us finish our study today by thinking about that in a positive way. We have trusted Christ as our Saviour. We have confessed Him as our Lord. We are completely clear

of the judgment of God. We are on our way to heaven, where Christ, our loving Saviour, is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, until He shall come again to receive us unto Himself. Praise His holy Name.

Now, let me say, "Thank you very much indeed for your patience in listening to this Truth for Today talk number T1176, entitled 'Press to the goal' 'Philippians 3:13 – 15', from our series named 'Good habits for Christians.'"

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