

8. Learning to Keep Our Eyes Focused on the Goal

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn many lessons from the example that Paul gave in his life. Paul wanted to grow in his understanding both of the power of the resurrection of Christ and in his understanding of the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. In the same way, we want to help our children grow both in their understanding of the power of the resurrection of Christ and the fellowship of His sufferings. Our children will grow in that understanding as they see how the Lord teaches us those lessons in our own lives. In our topic today, we want to show our children how to keep our eyes focused on the goal that Christ has for our lives.

Philippians 3:12-14 says, “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.” Paul did not feel that he had already reached the goal. He did not feel like he had already brought to completion the ministry that the Lord had for him. Instead, Paul planned to continue to press on. The word translated “press on” means *to continue to run quickly to reach the goal in a race*. Here, we see that Paul felt as long as he had life he was going to continue to work to become more like Christ in his life. Paul truly wanted to become like Christ.

Paul knew that he had not yet become all that God wanted him to be as Romans 8:28-29 says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” The goal of Paul was to become conformed to the image of Christ. He knew that God was using everything that happened in his life to help him become more like Christ.

Paul said that he was forgetting the things that had already happened in his life to help him become more like Christ. Some Christians have a hard time no longer caring about the things that they have done for the Lord in the past. Other Christians have a hard time no longer caring about the sins that they have committed in the past. Paul had both kinds of things happen in his past but he was not going to let those things control his future. This is one of the most common struggles that growing Christians face in their lives. As Christians, we need to fully understand Philippians 4:13 which says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Nothing in our future will be too difficult for the Lord to choose to do as He works through our lives. Everything from our past has been forgiven because Christ wants to work through our lives to accomplish what He has planned for our lives.

We said that the word that is translated “press on” was used to speak of a person that ran as fast as possible to reach the goal. Paul had such a goal for his life. His goal was the reward that Christ has for godly character that we will receive when the Lord calls us to heaven. As Paul neared the end of his life he said in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race,

I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” Paul was looking forward with great eagerness to the crown of righteousness.

Based on his own goal, Paul encouraged the Christians in Philippi to have the same goal. Philippians 3:15-16 says, “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.” In addition to the Philippians, Paul here encouraged all mature Christians to have this same attitude. For Christians who were still thinking about their past, Paul reminded them that God would reveal to them what they had not realized about their own lives. Here, we see that as we pray and ask the Lord to give us His understanding, He will help us to understand that the past is past.

The word that is translated “walk” means *to walk in a straight line* like a group of soldiers. Paul used this word in Galatians 5:25 where we read, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” To Christians who were growing in their spiritual lives, Paul encouraged them to keep walking as they had been walking because they were walking in the Spirit instead of their own strength. The word that is translated “mind” is the same word that was used twice in Philippians 2:2 and once in Philippians 2:5. In those verses, we saw that the word talks about the attitudes of our heart. Here, we see that we are to have the attitude of walking to please the Lord as we grow and become more like Christ.

In Philippians 3:17-19 we read, “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is* their belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things.” The word that is translated “following my example” means *to imitate me*. Paul also encouraged them to carefully look at the example or progress of others like Timothy and Silas. Paul said that he and these other men provided a pattern or an example to follow. In fact, Peter also said that this is how all spiritual leaders are to walk. 1 Peter 5:2-3 says, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” All godly leaders are to lead younger Christians by their example.

Paul warned the Christians in Philippi that there were many who pretended to be Christians, but were actually false teachers because they walked in a different way. In fact, Paul said that they were enemies of the cross of Christ. James wrote in James 4:4, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” Here, we see that there are many people who claim to be followers of the Lord who want to be friends with the world. James said, as did Paul, that these are enemies of God. We see several things about these false teachers.

First, we see that they are not true Christians because their end is destruction (eternal judgment). Second, their god is their own inner desires. Third, the very works in their lives that they boasted

about brought shame to them. Jude described this shame as he described false teachers in Jude 1:11-13 where we read, “Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” Here, we see that such false teachers who boast about their works are actually only serving themselves. Fourth, such false teachers have set their minds on earthly things. James describes their teaching and wisdom when he says in James 3:15, “This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic.” Here, we see that their earthly wisdom is sensual and demonic in its source.

In contrast, Paul went on to say in Philippians 3:20-21, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” Paul and all those who provide godly examples do not look for their rewards on this earth. Instead, true teachers provide godly examples because they realize that their citizenship is in heaven. The word that is translated “citizenship” means *the country where a person has their citizenship*. Another form of this word is used in Philippians 1:27 where we read, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” In this verse, the word is translated “conduct”, which demonstrates where we have our citizenship.

Since our citizenship is in heaven, Paul said that is why we are eagerly waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We look forward to the fact that Christ is going to change and transform our bodies when He takes us to heaven. The body that we have now is described as a lowly body. The Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah when Philip met him. What he was reading is quoted in Acts 8:33, where we read, “In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.” In this verse, the word translated “lowly” in Philippians is translated “humiliation” in Acts. Christ had a humble body on this earth and so do we. When Christ takes us to heaven, we will have a glorified body like the body that Christ had after His resurrection.

Here, we see that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that when we are true followers of Christ, we can look forward to the fact that Christ will completely transform us so that even our bodies will be like the body of Christ when we get to heaven. Christ is going to so change and transform our bodies that they will be able to last for all eternity. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to learn to focus on the goal that Christ has for each of our lives.