

Pressing on
Phil 3:12-16
January 31, 2021

Phil 3:12-16 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

The key to understanding this passage is the correct interpretation of the Greek word (teleios) rendered as perfect (vs.12, 15).

Teleios = to complete, make perfect by reaching the intended goal. Teleios in Greek has a variety of interrelated meanings. It means full-grown in contradistinction to undeveloped; for example:

- It is used of a full-grown man as opposed to it undeveloped youth.
- It is used to mean mature in mind and therefore means one who is qualified on the subject as opposed to a mere learner.
- When it is used of offerings, it means without blemish and fit to offer God.
- When it is used of Christians, it often means baptized persons who are full members of the church, as opposed to those who are still under instruction.

Teleios is translated:

“to accomplish” (Jn 4:34; 5:36; 17:4; 19:28)

“perfect” (Jn 17:23; 2Cor 12:9; Phil 3:12; Heb 2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; 9:9; 10:1, 14, 40; 12:23; Jas 2:22; 1Jn 2:5; 4:12, 17-18)

Paul says five things about maturity:

1. Paul sought to be a mature follower of Christ.

He had been saved to live and to serve Christ. As long as he was on the earth he was going to live for Christ and do all he could do (to press on) to serve Him.

“**To press on**” (dioko) = to pursue with earnestness and diligence in order to obtain, to go after with the desire of obtaining (Rom 9:30; 14:19; 1Cor 14:1; 1Thes 5:15; 1Tim 6:11; 2Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14).

Three things Paul pressed on to do:

1) To lay hold of God’s purpose for calling him, to fulfill his ministry (v. 12).

2) To win the prize (v. 14).

1Cor 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

3) To reach the upward (high) call of God (v. 14).

To press on means that the believer must not:

Become so comfortable as to become complacent, lethargic or lazy.

Begin to think he is safe and secure forever, therefore, he can sometimes do what he likes given to his own desires.

The believer must be active in living for Christ.

Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (1Cor 9:24-27)

2. Paul worked at forgetting the past.

“Forgetting” is stronger in the Greek, “completely forgetting.” Paul uses an illustration here of a Greek runner completely forgetting his opponents whom he is leading in the race. Just as a runner’s speed is slackened should he think of those behind him, and the thud, thud of their pounding feet, so the Christian’s onward progress is hindered should he dwell on the past full of failures and sins, full of heartaches and discouragements, full of disappointments and thwarted hopes and plans. As long as a Christian has made things right with God and man, he should completely forget the past. (From Wuest’s Word Studies)

3. Paul’s pursuit was forward.

The word means “to stretch forth after.” “Press” is literally “pursue.” “Mark” refers to a target for shooting, here a moral and spiritual target. “Toward” is from the preposition meaning “down,” and has the idea of “bearing down upon” in the direction of the goal. The mark is Christlikeness. What a goal for a Christian! (From Wuest’s Word Studies)

The past cannot be forgotten without reaching forth to what lies ahead. A person cannot sit around moaning and regretting the past. To do so is to be concentrating upon the past. The things of the past are to be forgotten. The things of the future are to be the focus of the mind. The believer is to zero in on the things at hand and on the things that lie ahead. If we do this, there is no time to wallow around in the past and in its failure. (From The Preachers Sermon Outline Bible)

4. Paul’s mindset was to grow in Christ to be a mature Christian.

I haven’t arrived yet – “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect (v. 12).

Our destination is to become like Jesus

Rom 8:29 ... He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, ...

Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; (v. 15)

Attitude = mindset; to employ one’s faculty for thoughtful planning, with emphasis upon the underlying disposition or attitude—‘to have an attitude, to think in a particular manner.’

Mind set (Rom 8:6-7, 27)

5. Paul sought to maintain the growth he had already achieved.

“let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained” (v. 16).

References used:

The Complete New Testament Word Study Dictionary
Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament
The Preachers Sermon Outline Bible
Letters to the Philippians, by William Barclay