

Midweek Message

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”

Philippians 3:12-16 ESV

The last couple of weeks we've been talking about what it means to be a believer in Jesus and how our faith should impact our lives. As we've seen, those who genuinely come to faith in Jesus are given new life by Jesus and as such are called to live in that new life for Jesus. However, I think we all know there can be great difficulty staying the course in every moment of every day as we're still those who, at times, struggle with personal sin. In this section of his letter to the Philippians the Apostle speaks to that very issue and I've got four points to share with you regarding how we can continue toward spiritual maturity and live as God has redeemed and called us to live.

First, in order to continue toward spiritual maturity, we must have a sound perception of ourselves. The Apostle Paul, as great a Christian as he was grasped that he hadn't yet arrived at all God wanted him to become. He tells us, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect,” reminding us that we're all prone to moral lapses and can easily fall prey to the influence of sin in our lives. You see, we need to realize that becoming a believer in Jesus is really only the beginning of a new life in Jesus, that there's a long way to go for us to be made perfect, and even though that's not something we'll ever achieve in this life. And yet, Jesus tells us, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48 ESV). Listen, we must continually be evaluating our lives, looking at those areas that need to be transformed, and then relying on God's wondrous grace to help us become better. Sure, we'll never be made perfect in this life because we still live in these bodies that have yet to be glorified. However, we can become more like Jesus when we strive toward spiritual maturity in Jesus.

Second, in order to continue toward spiritual maturity, we must have a significant passion from ourselves. The Apostle Paul takes us to this step when he writes, “but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” When it comes to God's goal for us, that is, becoming more like Jesus, we need to have the same passion the Apostle Paul had. We should have a burning desire, a significant passion, to reach the goal that will not subside until we arrive. Paul tells us that he pressed on, that is, he put forth the effort, he made it the passion of his life, the driving force all he would become in Jesus. You see, God has taken hold of our lives, having made us His very own, saving us from the judgment to come by sending Jesus to pay the price of our sins. And since we've been saved from our sins, we should then strive to overcome our sinful habits, living the life that reveals we've truly been redeemed. Listen, when God saved you He put you on the track and set you on course toward the finish line. However, we have to run the race. We have to strive forward. We have to press on. Spiritual maturity isn't going to happen in and of itself. Sure, God supplies the power. He's given us everything we need for life and godliness. In fact, the Apostle Peter tells us,

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and

steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:3-8 ESV)

Did you see that we have everything we need to be the kind of people God has redeemed us to be and to live the kind of lives God has called us to live? And yet, it's quite clear that we must put forth the effort in order to continue on toward spiritual maturity.

Third, in order to continue toward spiritual maturity, we must have a single purpose for ourselves. The Apostle Paul tells us, *“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* As God's people we should have one main focus, one main goal, one main pursuit in our lives, and that's to arrive at the finish line God has set before us, to become more and more like Jesus. Everything we do, all that God sets before us, should, in some way, be accomplished in such a way, that we do reflect our new life in Jesus and grow to become more like Jesus. You see, the problem we all face is that we lose sight of God's intended purpose for our lives following our salvation. Sometimes we can let the things of this world, the troubles we're facing, or the things of our past hinder us and pull us down from that lofty goal of growing in our faith. Listen, if we live in the past, we'll never escape the feelings of guilt and remorse. If we get caught up in all the things transpiring around us, we'll lose sight God's purpose for our lives. If we're anxious about the future we'll never strive to become the men, women, and young people God wants us to be. You see, if we lose sight of the goal, we'll never fully experience the power of Christ in our lives and we'll never truly know the joy that can be ours in Jesus.

Finally, in order to continue toward spiritual maturity, we must have a submissive posture within ourselves. Notice how the Apostle Paul closes this section as he writes, *“Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”* What he's doing here is, in a way, summarizing all that he's previous said with one additional thought, in that he reminds us how we're all at different points along the journey of life toward spiritual maturity. His point is that we need to be submissive to one another, realizing that none of us have fully arrived at perfection. You see, there are three general categories of biblical truth as all are not on the same plain of importance as others. There are primary beliefs, such as theological truths about God and our redemption which is clearly revealed in what we call the Apostle's Creed. These truths must be believed by all who profess faith in Jesus. Then there are secondary beliefs that are slightly less as important as primary beliefs such as the mode and method of baptism. We all believe baptism is important but there is disagreement regarding certain aspects of baptism. Then there are those tertiary beliefs, those biblical truths that we sometimes disagree over such as the kind of music in the worship service. You see, our problem is that we have a tendency to major on the minor truths and minor on the major truths. What the Apostle Paul is telling us is that, out of Christian love, we live according to what we've understood, keeping in mind there are some who might think differently than we do. Instead of fighting and arguing over some of the lessor important aspects of theology we should come together on common ground, the essential truths expressed in Scripture, and let the Holy Spirit move us along as we grow toward spiritual maturity in Jesus.

As God's people we should want nothing more than to become more and more like Jesus. The faith we profess must all be the faith we practice. I've often asked myself that if I were in a court of law being charged as a believer in Jesus, would there be enough evidence to convict me? I'm so thankful for all of you who are part of the Highlands family as I've seen, especially in this time of uncertainty, the faith you profess. Keep up the good work and continue to strive toward becoming more like Jesus.

Pastor Mark