

Knowing, Following, And Striving For Christ

Philippians 3:10-14

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There are many things that distinguish Christianity from other religions but one of the most significant distinctions is this: Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead after having been crucified and that He lives today to be known by those who believe and trust in Him. He lives today to be known.

Jesus of Nazareth, who was born in Bethlehem two millennia ago, who lived as a human being, who died a horrible death, and who rose, still lives, and consequently to know Him personally, intimately, and practically is an essential goal of every faithful Christian.

This was the apostle Paul's goal also. Philippians 3:10-12 is a great expression of it. In chapter 3, Paul critiques the Judaizers and explains the contrasting characteristics of the true church.

The goal of trusting in Christ is to know Him, that is, to know Christ in a personal relationship and also to know the power of His resurrection, namely the power that Christ exerts now from the right hand of God. This power is made known as we share the same kind of sufferings Jesus faced—the sufferings that manifest a faithful witness in an evil world. The good news is that those who suffer with and for Christ will attain the resurrection from the dead even as He did.

Philippians 3:10-12 That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 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.

Earlier in this epistle, Paul spoke of his initial faith in Christ, and here he speaks of the goal of Christian living. He wanted to know Jesus, to really know Him personally and intimately, as he writes about his desire the nature of that knowledge is clear, and as Passover approaches we certainly want to be in the state that Paul desired to be in and that is to really and truly know Jesus Christ personally, intimately in every way and understanding the way He lives so that we can live the same way.

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First, the nature of that knowledge is to be practical. Second, it is to be knowledgeable of God's power (taking this from Philippians 3:10-12), Third, it is to be learned in suffering. Fourth, it is to result in a life that is a preview of eternal life, of a resurrection to life in God's Kingdom.

In the first place, the nature of the knowledge Paul sought was practical. It is important to understand this aspect of his statement clearly because without this understanding of Paul's desire, the verses themselves are meaningless. Here Paul is writing of his desire to know Jesus Christ and by knowing Jesus, he knows the Father. Jesus made this clear to His twelve disciples.

Matthew 11:27 All things have been delivered to Me [that is Jesus] by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

We have to understand what perspective Paul was coming from if we want to know what he means when he said he wants to know Christ. In Philippians 3, Paul does not say he wants to know *about* Christ, he says he wants to *personally* know Christ. Between these two views is all the difference in the world.

The word 'know' has several different meanings in English, as also in other languages. It can mean to have learned by serious study, this is the way we know or learn analytical geometry, or calculus or some of the other mathematics. It can refer to understanding, this is the way we use the word when we say, "I know what is going on." It can even refer to a type of head knowledge that Paul told the Corinthians was detrimental to God's truth.

I Corinthians 8:1-2 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

This type of knowledge is not what Paul was looking for. He wanted to know Jesus in the truest biblical sense, personally, practically, and he wanted it to affect his day to day living. He wanted to see fruit from it, he wanted to see change and overcoming in his life as he grew to know Jesus more intimately.

It is an incomplete perspective of knowledge. To define the word knowledge, as society

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today understands it, we often confine it in the customary use, to the contents of the brain. The biblical dimensions of the word knowledge include this, but not as a complete definition. Knowledge adds a practical dimension, nothing is truly known unless it is being practiced in daily life, or in some way according to nature allowed to control the conduct of the person concerned.

Job 28:28 And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.'"

So we see where there is action involved in that, there is practical use in that knowledge or understanding.

Also in knowledge between persons: to know is to enter into the deepest personal intimacy and contact. The Bible does not say in Genesis 4: 1 that Adam knew Eve, because it is too shy to speak openly about sexual matters, but because this is what knowledge between human beings is—deep intimate union.

Consequently, having been saved by Christ, Paul wants to enter into the deepest possible union with Him. He will disappoint us but Jesus never will. It is entirely satisfying to know Him. Paul's desire did not stop merely with the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In the second place, Paul also wants to know God's power. Paul writes, "I want to know Christ, and the power of His resurrection." He is not speaking here of an abstract knowledge about the resurrection, any more than he is speaking of an abstract knowledge of Christ. Paul knew all about the resurrection, he knew the evidence for it and believed it as fact. Paul constantly proclaimed that wherever he went in his preaching. This is not what he is teaching about here however. Paul is speaking of experience. He states it in addition to knowing about the resurrection, he also wants to experience the power of it.

Paul wanted to experience this power above all living a godly life, and he knew that a life lived with Jesus Christ meant a life of holiness, but he also knew that such a life was impossible if it depended upon his own natural powers. He knew that the natural powers of a human cannot understand spiritual things.

I Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

He had learned by experience of his own inability to live as God intended, and therefore the Spirit of God is essential in truly knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection. Please turn to Romans 7. Notice how Paul describes the inability to do the right thing from the power of his own nature.

Romans 7:19-25 For the good that I will to do, I do not do, but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. [Obviously we see that Paul was doing things occasionally that he did not want to do. He was trying to resist but because of human weakness, just like us, he would sin at times. It was not a flagrant sin. It was a sin he tried not to commit.] I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

As in many other places in Paul's letters, Romans 7 reflects his emphasis on both the already aspect of salvation, that we have been saved, and the not-yet aspect that we will be saved ultimately and for all eternity at the return of Christ. We live in the tension between the already and the not-yet.

Paul longed for deliverance from such defeat through Christ's resurrection power, and he was sensitive to power as were many of his contemporaries. His world was a world of power. Most of it originated from Rome and was controlled by the Roman authorities throughout the empire.

Jews were proud of their religious heritage, and Greeks were proud of their wisdom, but the Romans were proud of their power, and it showed, and we know this from history. To them it was the greatest reality in the world, and this was Paul's environment, and he saw first hand the power of the Roman Empire. Having to appeal to Rome on several occasions, Paul knew that at best it still had very limited power compared to God's awesome power over the physical and spiritual realms.

Paul knew that sin carried with it the power of the penalty of death, and it held people in a vicelike grip through a tyranny far more terrible than Rome's. But God's power carries

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with it the resurrection of Jesus. Paul knew that God's power could overcome sin and death and that it was far greater than Rome's armies.

The power of Christ is a great reality. Indwelling sin is overcome through the power of the indwelling spirit. Above all Paul wanted to experience the resurrection power of Christ and overcome sin daily as he strives to live a holy life in God's presence. This is what we are trying to do today, especially in this pre-Passover period.

In the third place Paul said in Philippians 3:10 that he desires to know the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings. This does not mean that Paul wanted to suffer for all human sin, because only Christ can do that. He alone suffered innocently and therefore for others. Paul desired to join in Christ's sufferings in a different sense. He wanted to stand with Christ in such an indivisible union that when the abuses and persecution that Christ suffered also fell on him, as he knew they would, he would receive them as a true witness of Christ's sufferings.

Paul wanted to react like Jesus did, because he knew that abuse received like this would actually draw him closer to his Lord and Savior. Such sufferings will always come to us as Christians, and Peter reminds us that it is not unusual for the followers of Christ to suffer for His sake, and that we are to count it as a blessing to share such a thing.

When we have the right perspective and positive frame of mind by knowing that when Christ's glory is revealed, we will share in it.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Part of truly knowing Christ is to understand Him through His sufferings. Paul reminded Timothy of this.

II Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Such persecution will come upon us if we work at living our lives as God commands us. But persecutions do not have to be tragic. On the contrary, they can draw us closer to God and Christ, while allowing Christ's life to be clearly seen in us as we give a true

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witness during a time of persecution.

It is important to realize that the knowledge of Christ's sufferings comes at a very high price—the price of total obedience. This is why Paul writes of becoming like Him in His death. To understand this phrase, go back to chapter 2 of his letter to the Philippians. Paul speaks of Christ's obedience and death, and holds it up as a pattern for all Christian conduct.

He points out that Jesus was so careful to obey His Father that He laid aside His outward layer of glory and took on Himself human form and nature, enduring all the sufferings of the world, that He even died as a man in obedience to His Father will. The fellowship of Christ's sufferings is won at the price of such essential and total obedience. We have to be like Christ in that.

We must be careful to obey God completely, even at the expense of open persecution and real suffering. Compromise does not lead us to the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. If we are to know Him, really know Him, we must obey Him completely. God's truth is not a smorgasbord from which we may pick and choose which commands pleases our tastes. We do not choose when we are going to worship Him on the Sabbath, we do not choose whether to come or not, we come and worship Him every Sabbath.

In the fourth and last place of this great expression of Paul's goals, he tells us in Philippians 3:10-11 why he desires to know Christ so completely, and to be like Him in His death so he might attain to the resurrection from the dead, and all that that involves.

It is not that Paul was afraid for his eternal life. He was well aware of the assurance that he had through faith. In Hebrews 6, he encourages us to show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, so that we do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Paul had some doubt as to when his resurrection would occur, but not if it would occur.

Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In separating us from the love of God, he wanted to have that knowledge, that intimate union with Christ and God the Father. Paul's confidence was a steadfast faith, because he believed that Christ would complete his spiritual growth in him, so that he would be

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ready for his own resurrection, and he assured others of it as well.

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Paul had no doubt whatsoever that Christ was going to complete His work in him and in the saints later on, the members of God's church. He had that confidence and assurance and no doubt he had only wondered *when* it would actually happen that he would be resurrected.

This does not sound like someone who was concerned about his eternal life. Paul knew that God would make sure he has what he needs to be in the Kingdom, Eternal life is not as much a measure in time, a beginning with no end, as it is a quality of life. It is union with God, and glory into which the faithful enter. Eternal life is nothing less than Christ in us.

Paul's faith is not waning. He just wants to be so much like Christ in the way Christ lived, that he would give a true witness of one who has the character of a resurrected person, even now, even before his physical death.

Philippians 3:8-11 But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

What does Paul mean when he desires to attain to the resurrection from the dead? There is a clue in the Greek text. The word for resurrection in verse 11 differs from the word resurrection in verse 10. In verse 11, the word has a little preposition in front of it, the preposition *ek*, which is equivalent to our word out. The word resurrection literally means to place, or stand up.

To the Greek mind, living people were standing up and dead people were lying down, so making a Greek pun, Paul said, "I want to know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering that I may give the spiritually dead a preview of

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eternal life in action. As I am standing up, outstanding among those who are spiritually on their backs—spiritually dead.”

The ideal is that we should be making every effort to be diligently living for Christ, so much so that, we not only appear to be, but are as one resurrected among those who are spiritually dead. Even individual members of God's church can achieve this because Christ dwells in us and His righteousness is attributed to us. Resurrection in verse 11 is synonymous with eternal life; it is a quality of life, and we are to be living that quality of life now.

It has been said that an ideal is something that everyone is expected to honor but nobody is expected to attain. Sadly many people think of Christian discipleship in this way. The goals of discipleship are not unattainable ideals, the Bible does not allow us to escape the demands of Christian discipleship by the excuse that the standards of that calling are too high.

So far we have seen Paul's expression of his lifelong desire to know Jesus Christ. He wrote of his desire to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, in verse 10. Paul pursued and lived his desire as an example to us. As he wrote these words, he must have realized that there would be some among his readers at Philippi, as there are today, who would dismiss his words as something no Christian could possibly be expected to accomplish. They would admit that the ideal was a good one but they would call it totally unpractical.

Paul does not allow this kind of thinking to continue. He immediately adds that although even he has not realized the goal in all entirety, he is still trying, and we should understand him to imply that his readers should be trying as well—and his readers are us. Continuing in Philippians 3:12, we begin to read of his pressing toward the goal.

Philippians 3:12 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.

Now Paul's affirmation is not only a statement of the demands of Christian life, it is also an announcement of the principles by which this calling should be realized. First, Paul acknowledges that he was called by God through Jesus Christ. Second, he notes that God has a purpose in calling him, that it was planned. Third, he acknowledges that this puts an obligation on himself, the obligation to follow Christ, and that same obligation is on us as members of God's church. If you and I are to be Christ's disciples, these

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principles must also be a part of our goals and Christian understanding.

It is very important to understand and recognize that all Christians' discipleship begins with God's call or as Paul said, with being laid hold of by Christ Jesus. God's call must be foremost because nothing can take place spiritually in a person's life until this happens. Actually it involves a creation of spiritual life.

It would be foolish for a person to enter a funeral home to encourage the corpses to lead an upright life. If the words were to have any purpose the corpses would first have to be made alive. In the same way the call to the discipleship must begin with the power of God to make a spiritually dead person alive, because only then are the standards of the calling significant.

This is what the new birth means. Before conversion, God says a person is dead in his trespasses and sins. A person is alive physically and intellectually but not alive spiritually, thus he cannot respond to spiritual stimuli.

While he is in this state, the Word of God is a hidden book to him, and the gospel of Jesus Christ is nonsense. Then God calls him by opening his mind to simple spiritual truths. Some people answer the call and many do not. Some people answer His call in faith and begin to move forward taking the quantum leap of faith in answering God's blessing of goodness, of His grace which leads to repentance. Along the way He is patient with us, and the apostle Peter wrote of this in II Peter 3.

II Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

God is the one who takes hold of us and calls us. He brings life out of death by imparting His Holy Spirit, the life of the spirit, and if we believe in Jesus Christ and we begin to understand the Bible, if we answer the call diligently and continue to seek God, our biblical understanding turns into knowing God and Christ intimately.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

This is a promise and a guarantee and we find examples of this throughout the Bible.

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Abraham was laid hold of by God. Abraham was not the one who initially chose God, he was perfectly satisfied where he was, in Mesopotamia river valley, in a pagan culture, but God called him and sent him on his way to Palestine.

Moses was laid hold of by God when he was still a baby floating in the Nile in a basket. God chose Moses for a specific purpose, to deliver his people from Egypt and sin, and protected him from Pharaoh. God gave him the best of the world's training in leadership and education and He did great miracles through him.

There is also the story of David, and God put His stamp on the future King David when he was still out protecting sheep. God sent the prophet Samuel to David's home to anoint one of the sons that was in the family of Jesse. David's father Jesse did not see as God sees and brought out all his sons in order, except David. Samuel looked at the boys and thought how good a king the eldest son Eliab would make, but before Samuel could anoint him, God indicated that he was not the one.

Next was Abinadab, who was not God's choice of the future king either, then there was Shammah, and so on.

I Samuel 16:10-13 Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all the young men here?" Then he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and there he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here." So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good looking. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

Once again, it was God who chose and took hold of David. People do not see what God sees in people.

In the New Testament, God chose John the Baptizer before he was born. Jesus called his disciples while they were still fishermen, and God called Paul when he was in the process of persecuting Christians. In every case the call of God was primary, this has always been the foundational method of true discipleship. Each and every one of us here that is truly converted, has been personally called by God the Father through Jesus Christ. What an honor and a privilege.

If you are one of God's children, He has picked you and made you His. He has given you spiritual life so you can now understand His love, grace, and other biblical doctrines, and this has not happen randomly. It has happened with intent, and purpose, and by design. If you are making your call and election sure, you have acknowledged God's call to you through Jesus Christ, and your need for Him, and you have committed yourself to Him.

II Peter 1:5-10 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. [That right there is a challenge that we can only accomplish with God's Spirit.] For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [This tells us exactly how to become intimate, to have the know-how to love Jesus Christ] For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, [spiritual blindness] and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.

That is quite a guarantee. The second step in becoming an effective disciple of Jesus Christ is to be aware of the purpose for which He has called you. Remember what Paul said in Philippians 3:12, I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. What was the apostle Paul, and we as Christians, laid hold of? For what purpose?

Romans 8:28-30 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. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

We know that God has a purpose in saving us. Verse 29 tells us what the purpose is: 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. God's purpose in saving us is that we might be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. God is saving us to make us holy, pure, gracious, and loving, as Christ is. Everything Paul mentioned in Philippians 3 has to do with the Christian's present conduct. When Paul speaks of knowing Christ in

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Philippians 3:10, he is speaking of knowing Him *now*, not in the future only, because it is a process in knowing Jesus Christ. We are to work to know Christ now, and from here on out. In Philippians 3:13 and 14, Paul speaks of a present striving for the best that God has for him now.

Here in Romans 8, we find a similar thing. Paul was saying that he wants to be conformed to the image of Christ now. This is God's great purpose in calling us, to have faith in Jesus Christ. We are not to put it off till later, we must act now, as if He was returning tomorrow, which we know He will not, because we know that there is at least three and a half years of the Tribulation.

The third step in becoming an effective disciple is that we have an obligation to follow Christ and Paul knew that because God had called him, that He has done so for a purpose. He himself must determine to follow after Christ. Christ's calling always puts an obligation on His children. This is quite personal, discipleship is always personal. Remember how it was with Peter. Peter unknowingly avoided deep personal contact with Jesus by speaking impetuously and often on behalf of the twelve, but when Jesus came to re-commission him after Peter's denial, there was no escaping a personal response, and Jesus asked a simple but profound question.

John 21:15-22 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes Lord, You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him a third time, "Simon son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to Him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord you know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Most assuredly I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" Peter seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."

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The point I want to make there is that of all that was discussed, whether Peter loved Him or not and who was going to die when or survive, the point Christ wanted to make was, "Follow Me." That is the message to us as well: Follow Jesus Christ, and imitate Him. It seems like an obvious statement but do we carry that with us every moment of our life, every hour of the day, every day of the week, every week of the month, and every month of the year? Discipleship can never be conditioned upon God's plans for some other Christian. Christ's call is always a personal one to "Follow Me."

It is also true that discipleship is costly, in fact it costs a person his all, and there are always professing Christians that think that they can be Christ disciple's piece meal. They think they can follow Him an inch at a time, after first assuring themselves that there is no danger, and that following Him also conforms to their own plans for themselves and their future.

This is not discipleship at all. Discipleship means abandoning and overcoming your sin, your past, your own conception of yourself, your plans for your own future, even at times your friends and your family, if that is God's will for you and is the result of following Christ.

Our own human nature tends to draw back and say, "But it's hard to give up the things that I treasure." It was never supposed to be easy, but it is also true that there is a far greater sense than which we really have not given up anywhere near as much as the Father and Jesus Christ. We give *things* up, but Christ gave up more, and gives us more.

Even the things we surrender are so arranged by God that they work for our spiritual well-being. Peter learned this in a conversation that he had with Jesus, and Mark tells us that just before Christ's final journey into Jerusalem, there was a point when Peter was bragging, in this case reminding Jesus of his sacrifices in order to serve Him.

Mark 10:23-28 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God." And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." And they were astonished beyond measure, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" But looking at them, Jesus said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God. For God all things are possible." Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."

In other words, Peter was reminding Jesus that He was an ideal disciple and that his discipleship had proven costly. Peter was being nonsensical, he had left hardly anything and his claim was presumptuous and here is how Jesus replied, verse 29.

Mark 10:29-31 Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Jesus was teaching that any loss the disciple's suffered, God would abundantly compensate for. Spiritually, there is no comparison.

Most of you are very familiar with one of his most popular American stories, written by the novelist and writer, Mark Twain. He told the story of the Prince and the Pauper. The two main characters were boys who came from entirely different backgrounds and circumstances, but they looked alike. One day when by chance they were thrown together, they decided to put on each others clothes, and the prince put on the pauper's rags, and the poor boy put on the rich one's finery, but the boys became separated, the pauper was mistaken for the prince and taken to live in the palace, while the prince was turned back to the poor streets of London, where he suffered great indignities before he eventually regained his rightful place and his throne. We all have that mental picture, now please turn to II Corinthians 8.

In a similar way, Christ took on our poverty, and while we have been clothed in his finery, notice what Paul writes,

II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for you sakes He became poor, that you [each of us] through His poverty might become rich. [We could add the word spiritually to that].

He became poor as we were so that we might be clothed in His righteousness. He endured suffering and death so that we might become like Him, sons of God and co-heirs with Christ of God's glory.

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It is true that the pauper must give up their rags, but there is no comparison between our rags and God's glory. Jesus has told us that there is nothing given up in this life that does not get replaced a hundredfold by spiritual treasure. Not only in this world, but in the eternity also.

It may be that God has been asking you to lay aside something in order that you might be a more effective witness for Him. The thing that is a hindrance for one disciple is often entirely different for another, whatever it is, you know it. If not, God will reveal it to you. At this point in your life, for you it is the touchstone of your discipleship. If you cast it aside to follow Jesus Christ, you will grow in your Christian discipleship and God will bring great blessing into your life, and through you also, into the lives of others. It is a win-win situation to give up those things which we hang onto that are worldly.

As life goes on, many people reach a point of complacency, they have an absence of the motivation to aim very high. Christians often suffer from the same lack of attempt to accomplish anything. In this case of course it would be a spiritual apathy.

It would be seen most clearly that complacency regarding spiritual things. Sadly this complacency is found widely. It may be found in you! Have you lost your vision of God's future? God's future blessing on your life? Or have you ceased to work hard in His service, or have you lost sight of His Kingdom? If so, you have the contagious spiritual disease and the words of Philippians 3:13-14 should be an arousing challenge to your apathy. Paul writes about his goals setting himself as an example.

Philippians 3:13-14 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 was not complacent, and we should not be either. Instead of smugness, Paul knew a sanctified ambition, and he threw himself eagerly into the race that God had set before him. He said that he had learned to press ahead in three ways.

First, he forgets those things that are behind, second, he looks forward to those things that are ahead, and third, he presses on toward the mark of the prize of God's calling. In Paul's mind it was sanctified forgetting, a sanctified looking ahead, and a sanctified determination for that to which God had called him. Determination was a characteristic of Paul that was outstanding.

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In the first I mentioned to press ahead. Paul said he forgets those things that are behind. Now what are they? He certainly did not forget his knowledge of the Bible and God's truth, the letter to the Philippians he had just written proves that. Furthermore he certainly did not forget God's grace and great mercies, because he has been talking about them through the letter, and he knew without a shadow of a doubt that all he had to value in his life came through the grace of God, manifested in Jesus Christ.

What is the nature of this forgetting? It is the kind of forgetting that occurs when we cease to let things that are in the past overshadow the present, let the past be the past, and that constantly looks forward to the work that God still has for us.

We cannot live off our past morals and we cannot keep beating ourselves up over things of which we have already repented. The question is: what kind of person am I today? Often people wish for the good old days when things are not going well, all the while ignoring the abundance of blessings that God has mercifully and graciously provided.

When a bill comes in and we do not have the money for it, we immediately think about that bill and our past debts and everything else having to do with that. We totally forget about the blessings that God has put in front of us in other areas in our lives.

There is an illustration of the opposite of this attitude in the Old Testament. When God led the people of Israel out of Egypt toward the Promised Land, He provided everything that they needed for their journey. They had shade by day and light by night, they had water to drink, and manna to eat. The time came however when the people ceased to look forward to the land that God was giving them, instead they looked back to their life in Egypt.

Numbers 11: 4-6 Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving, so the children of Israel also wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, [they were slaves but they thought ate freely] the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our whole being is dried up. There is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes."

The people of Israel began to lust for these things, and God taught them a great lesson by giving them the things that they asked for. There is a lesson there for us in that: be careful what you ask for. He gave them quail until they grew sick of it. The point of the illustration however is that they began to look back and failed to trust God for their present and future blessings. They lacked faith, they had lost their confidence and trust

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in God.

This does not mean that we are not to be thankful for past blessings. If we had been among the people of Israel when they were in Egypt and had been able to buy the cucumbers, melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic, it would have been quite proper to thank God for them, especially if we had been slaves.

It would be entirely wrong to long for these things, after God had begun to lead us into new paths, into a new life, and had set new and greater blessings before us. Sadly there are many leeks-and-garlic-Christians among us. You may be one if you are constantly looking at the past. Things in this world will never be the same again, never, ever.

We have entered a new episode in history, and that is seeing a destruction of freedom, and life that is unprecedented, so we must count our blessings every day, in fact every hour of every day, otherwise it will eat us up. That is, the deterioration, the destruction, the persecution that is coming, will eat us alive.

Old age has been described as a point in life when a person ceases to look forward and always looks back. If that is accurate then there are certainly a lot of old age Christians, and I do not mean in terms of their years.

Paul warns against the leeks-and-garlic type of Christianity. Paul thought proactively not reactively, he just did not react to things in life, he planned ahead, he planned what he was going to overcome or what needed to. He planned what he was going to do to serve God, and he meditated on those things.

Past blessings are wonderful and should be appreciated and we have received them from God's hands, and we should be thankful for them and rejoice in everything that He has done and will do for us. But now we must let those things lie in the past, that is, the worldly things lie in the past, and move forward.

A second way to press ahead, Paul said, is he focuses on the many things that God would be doing in the future. He is always looking forward. In Philippians 3:13, he speaks of himself as forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.

Paul recognized Christ's leadership over him involved open doors, and he expected God to open the doors, and when He did, Paul went through them immediately and enthusiastically. In marching through those doors, God was constantly striving toward those things that were ahead.

Philippians 3:14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

When he speaks of the goal and the prize of God's high calling, it is easy to assume that he speaks of a prize received in heaven. Then interpret verse 13, as a description of Paul striving for a heavenly reward.

However, this is not the true meaning of the verse. It is true that the prize is a probably a prize received in heaven, but the prize is achieved as in a long race, not by pressing toward the prize alone, but by pressing on to one mark after another, along the race course of the Christian life.

Actually Paul said that he is striving to *achieve* this aspect of his calling. It is not just that he is striving to receive that one award, crown, or trophy. He is striving along the way, always upwardly.

This is evident in the context in two ways. First, verse 14 speaks of the upward calling of God in Jesus Christ. This throws the emphasis of the verse on the ascent. This is a metaphor used in athletics, in a race, in the time of Paul, the judge would stand on a pedestal on which he would call the winner up to the pedestal. He was given the upward call to receive the prize. The emphasis is on the upward call.

Second, in the New Testament when the word is used concerning a Christian, it almost always refers to God's calling, to be conformed day by day to the image of Jesus Christ. This is also a reference to the present. Do we run our race like that as Christians? We can err in two ways in the running of a Christian life: we can err by looking only at the past and this is sin because it is a lack of faith in God's future blessings. We can also err by looking only at so distant a future that we miss the more immediate blessing that God has in store for us in this life.

This life of a Christian is a joyous, joyful, rejoicing life! It is one of spiritual happiness and peace, tranquility, there are many, many blessings that we are already receiving and that we must acknowledge, and be thankful for.

Instead of either of these we must run our race striving toward each new task that is set before us. Every morning we must thank God for the new day that He has given us, and ask Him to help us make the best of new things to be done, and new lessons to be learned.

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It is important to ask Him to help us to raise our children properly, to do well at our jobs, and to help the brethren to make the best of their day. When we go to bed each night to acknowledge that being human we have not done the best, as we should have, and we are sorry for missing many of His blessings, but thank Him for being with us.

We can ask God to help us to place the stresses of today's experiences behind and to grant us the peace to rest well so that we may serve Him more effectively tomorrow. God will do it, because He is determined to lead us onward and upward in our experience and our service with Him.

A third way to press ahead—the life Paul wants to live—involves not only a forgetting of the past, and looking forward to the things that lie ahead, it also involves the striving for these things. This involves perseverance, discipline, and concentration. Since we are obligated to engage in the great struggle to live God's way of life, we must also be prepared for the vigorous spiritual conflict that comes along with it.

Our striving is not only against our own human nature, but in a greater way against the spiritual forces of this world that seek to hinder us. Paul calls them principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, especially at this pre-Passover time of year. Satan's attacks are directed against the followers of Jesus Christ. The farther away from God we allow ourselves to get, the greater the success rate of Satan's fiery darts, of temptation, negativism, self-centeredness, envy, and greed.

Those darts are furious suggestions of evil and excitements to sin, which he may throw into the mind like the fiery darts, but there are improper thoughts, unbelief, and sudden temptations to do wrong that he throws at us. All too often Christians make the tragic mistake of arming themselves with the world's weapons instead of with God's armor.

In Ephesians 6, Paul speaks of God's weapons as truth and righteousness, the gospel of faith and salvation, and the Word of God. Often Christians prefer the world's armor, human reasoning and knowledge, self confidence, financial security, physical power, control, popularity. This is not the armor that God has prepared for His soldiers, as you are well aware. Paul lists the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-20.

We will not turn there, but I will generally refer to this scripture, because human nature tends to push us toward the world's armor for protection. Ironically the world's armor only provides protection by using evil ways.

The first piece of God's armor is truth.

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Ephesians 6:14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

As you know Pilate asked Jesus about the truth, but he did not wait for an answer because he really did not want to know what the truth was. If he had, he would have learned that Christ is the truth and that God's Word is truth. If we are to stand as Christians, we must first be armed with God's truth, we must be armed with the great energizing principles of God's Word and we must immediately know how God and Christ think, and live.

We are also to have on the breastplate of righteousness. Paul was not talking about the righteousness which we are clothed by God when we believe in Jesus Christ. It is not the divine righteousness that Paul was talking about there in the list of the armor of God. If we are intimate followers of Christ, we already have that divine righteousness of Christ, there is no more need to admonish the Christian to put it on. The righteousness mentioned there in God's armor is a practical righteousness that is meant to characterize the life of the individual.

We are to live holy lives and must not allow our conduct to damage our witness of God's way of life. We are to put on righteousness, we are to live holy lives. We are to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. This means that we are to have mastered the heart of the gospel of God's grace to humans in Jesus Christ, and to be ready to explain the hope that is in us to others. The apostle Peter admonishes us:

I Peter 3:15-17 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

We are also to take the shield of faith. This is not the faith we exercise in believing Jesus Christ initially, but a present living faith that does not doubt in the midst of God's dealing with us or in the midst of the persecution and the trials that we are to endure in this life.

There is also the helmet of salvation. It is comforting and wonderful to know that our salvation and eternal life has been worked out for us if we will submit to God and obey

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Him.

Finally we are to take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. A special Greek word is used for the term word. In Ephesians 6: 17, it gives the verse a slightly different meaning from the previous admonition in verse 14, to be armed with the truth.

The word is not the normal Greek word logos, which refers to the Word of God in the entirety, it is the more restrictive word rhema, which really means, a saying, and Paul was saying that we are to be armed with the specific things of Scripture, specific verses, and that we are to be able to draw on them in every circumstance, and in every spiritual engagement.

That is quite a tall order, but it is very important if God is telling us that we are supposed to be doing that.

The question is: which armor do you usually choose? Do you choose God's solutions for your problems and your trials, or do you choose the world's solutions? We are known by our fruit.

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd, and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.

If we are known by Christ and we know Him intimately, the results will be noticeable. We will produce fruit and be a true witness of God's way of life to others. As we engage in the spiritual battles of a Christian life that result from our striving for the victories that God sets before us, we can take confidence in the fact that the victory of Jesus Christ already has a guaranteed outcome.

By His death and resurrection, Christ decisively defeated Satan in the forces of darkness, so if we are striving for the living Christ, then we can be confident that we are now advancing under His banner, and marching to victory after victory over Satan, the world, and our own human nature.