

9/6/26

Growing Towards Christlikeness

Phil. 3:12-16

The determined purpose of the life of Paul was to grow and mature in Christ Jesus to be constantly being conformed into the image of Christ by the very same power that raised Christ. Phil. 3:10-11

1. This clearly is not a natural desire of our sin nature.
2. But tragically, neither is it guaranteed automatically by our new nature.
3. There is always in the believer's life personal responsibility to grow, develop and mature in faith through obedience. Phil. 2:12-13

Paul has just revealed to the Philippians that the believer's positional sanctification is through the righteousness of Christ by faith in Christ, not by the Law or any other personal accomplishments.

Paul now moves to reveal that the believer's practical sanctification is an ongoing process of spiritual maturity throughout life, not a product of perfection in this life, characterized by three things. Phil. 3:12-16

- I. The perspective regarding spiritual maturity. vs. 12
- II. The principles regarding spiritual maturity. vs. 13-14
- III. The persons regarding spiritual maturity. vs. 15-16

I. The perspective regarding spiritual maturity. vs. 12

- A. The apostle Paul declared he had not yet reach final spiritual maturity in this life. vs. 12a-b
 - * "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected".
1. Paul did not attain final maturity all at once at conversion on the Damascus Road. Acts 9
 - a. The word attained attained "lambanno", means to lay hold or receive.
 - 1) The indicative aorist active tense is not a completed action finalized.
 - 2) The negative is expressed; he did not lay hold or received at his conversion everything God had for him.
 - b. The conversion and salvation of Paul on the Road to Damascus *was* only the beginning of a long life process.
 - 1) There were many other things he would learn and experience.
 - 2) There were many other things God would do through him.
 - c. This attaining or getting hold of was the active responsibility of Paul to seek God for and appropriate.
 - d. The question is what is the thing that he had not laid hold of or attained?
 - 1) Some say the prize in verse fourteen, but it does not make sense, for it must

be related to what has already been stated, this explains what precedes.

2) Paul has just told them his motive for being found in the righteousness of Christ, that he may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death and be raised out from the dead. vs. 10-11

3) Paul had laid hold and appropriated the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings and being conformed to His death on an ongoing process, but not to a final state nor yet experienced the physical resurrection, as was obvious, but some were teaching that lie.

* Paul named two individuals, “Their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.” 2Tim. 2:17-18

2. Paul also had not to the present day been perfected to moral or spiritual maturity.

a. The word perfected “teleioo”, means to complete, accomplished or consummate to the end.

b. His conversion on the Damascus Road had only begun his growth towards spiritual maturity, a life long process.

c. Paul had continued in this process as he labored about 5 years in Tarsus, 1 at Antioch and 3 missionary journeys.

* If Paul was saved in 35 A. D., he went up to Jerusalem, in 38 A.D. he was already in Antioch by 43 A.D.

d. Paul is writing the letter thirty years later, still in the process of spiritual maturity.

* He had not come to the place in his Christian life where there was no room for growth in spiritual maturity, having reached the full measure!

B. The apostle Paul declared there were specific works and events God had purposed to work out the process of spiritual maturity. vs. 12c-d

* “but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me”.

1. Paul recognized his need to move forward on in salvation. vs. 12c

a. The word but “de” is a contrasting conjunction.

1) The sharp contrast is emphatic.

2) From not having been perfected, to pressing on to perfection.

b. The phrase press on “dioko” means to pursue or chase, the root word is to flee.

- 1) The tense is a durative present, continuously pursuing.
- 2) The word is used of a hunter chasing and hunting down his prey.
- 3) The word is also used by Jesus for Paul in the negative, “Why are you persecuting Me?” Acts 9:4
- c. This was Paul’s daily discipline the next step moving him on in spiritual maturity.
2. Paul recognized he was responsible to lay hold of the purposes of God for his life, “which Christ Jesus has also laid hold on me.” vs. 12d
 - a. The word he used is the historical aorist, “which Christ laid hold on me”.
 - 1) The past experience of Damascus and the future, “that I may lay hold”.
 - 2) The Greek word is “katalambano”, to make for ones own, to obtain.
 - 3) The tense is the aorist active.
 - b. Linskie the Greek scholar says, “Paul is steadily pursuing in expectation of making the capture with finality “aorist”, and this rests on the fact that at Damascus he got captured by Christ. Both are strictly puntiliar and indicate momentary acts; all in an instant Paul got captured; all in an instant, when the time comes he will get to capture”. Page 847
 - 1) Paul went to Arabia for three years and preached in Damascus having to

- flee for his life. Gal. 1:15-17, 2Cor. 11:32-33
- 2) Paul then went to Jerusalem and was accepted by Barnabus and spoke up for Paul. Gal. 1:18-19; Acts 9:26-27
 - 3) Paul was sent to Tarsus, due to a plot against his life till Barnabas sought him out for the work at Antioch. Acts 9:28-30; 11:22-26; Gal. 1:21-24
 - 4) Paul later would lead three missionary journeys. Acs 13-19
 - * All of these being the process to press Paul on to spiritual maturity and Christlikeness!

Illustration

A teenager who thinks he or she knows everything.

Application

1. The person who thinks they have arrived at a final spiritual maturity at any period of their life is not living in reality, but deception.
 - a. They are the first to know they still fail and have the capacity to sin, so they are deceived.
 - b. They are ignoring and denying the people that confront them and point out their imperfections.
 - c. They are contradicting the Scriptures.
 - * Jesus said to the Jews who caught the woman in the very act of adultery, “He who is **without sin** among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” Jn. 8:7c-d

2. The question is are you laying hold for what Christ has laid hold on you for?

- a. They will reveal your need of further maturity.
- b. They will reveal that you have not arrived.
- c. They will make you more like Jesus Christ.

* “For we are His **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10

This is the perspective regarding spiritual maturity!

II. The principles to accomplish spiritual maturity. vs. 13-14

A. The apostle Paul recognized as long as he was alive in his physical body, he had not apprehended all God has for him. vs. 13a-b

* “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended”.

1. Paul is cutting off any thought or idea he or any person had accomplished all in life.

a. The apostle Paul lived in reality.

1) The first word count “logizomai”, means to consider, reckon or conclude, an accounting term.

* The tense is the indicative present middle voice, concluding this himself at the present time of the epistle.

2) The second word is apprehend “katalambano”, is the same word as

the phrase “laid hold of” in verse twelve, but in the negative.

a) The tense is the perfect active; to not have made for one’s own all the things Christ apprehended him for.

b) The word is translated “taken” for the woman taken in adultery. Jn. 8:3

b. The apostle Paul wanted the Philippian to know two things.

1) He had no such high opinion of himself.

2) He did not want any one to have such an opinion of him, being false.

* Paul considered himself the worst of sinner, not worthy to be called an apostle of Christ because he persecuted the church. 1Cor. 15:9

2. Paul is declaring a mild rebuke to those who thought they had apprehended all and had become complacent or lazy.

a. There were those who were not one with Paul and were preaching Christ to add to his hurt. Phil. 1:16

b. There were the Judaizers who were attempting to convince the believer to trust in the Law for their perfect standing before God. Phil. 3:2-4

c. The first of Luther’s ninety-five famous Thesis was, “The whole Christian life is a continuous repentance”.

- B.** The apostle Paul recognized he had to repeat daily three-fold process. vs. 13c-14
- 1.** Paul said first, the past must be reckoned dead every day, “One things I do, forgetting those things which are behind”, focusing on our attitude. vs. 13c-d
 - a.** Paul used the athletic metaphor of a runner to describe the Christian race.
 - * He was very familiar with the Olympic games at the amphi-theatre at Ephesus and the Isthmian games at Corinth.
 - b.** The primarily context refers to forgetting all his works to be justified before God.
 - 1)** But also what God had done in and through him to be living in the past, as if that was all God had for him.
 - 2)** Or that there was nothing better to come and miss the present and future things God had ahead.
 - c.** The past works of God can hypnotize us so as to cripple us for the present and future, always thinking of the good old days, having an attitude that there is nothing better ahead.
 - 2.** Paul said secondly, the present must be lived in expectant hope, “and reaching forward to those things which are ahead”, focusing on his actions. vs. 13d
 - a.** He again continues his metaphor of a race by the phrase reaching forward “epektinomai” describes a runner

- stretching out towards the finish line with his eyes fastened and his body thrust forward to reach the end.
- * The word is found only this time in the New Testament.
- b.** Once I have fixed my eyes on Jesus so as not to be mesmerized or enslaved by the past then I can have my mind clear, sound and sensitive to the things He has for me, then I can “reach for the things that are ahead”.
 - * In reality is both of these are done at the same time, “forgetting the past and reaching ahead”!
 - c.** He knew that the only way he could win the race was to run forward, looking to the finish line.
 - d.** He was in prison, but he still was looking forward towards greater things ahead.
 - * It is a constant warfare that we have to fight with spiritual weapons, not carnal, to not be distracted from reaching forward to the things ahead God has for us. 2Cor. 10:4-5
 - 3.** Paul said thirdly, the present must have passion toward the future, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God, in Christ Jesus”, focusing on our commitment. vs. 14
 - a.** The apostle continues his imagery of a race by the word goal “skopos” which

comes from the word to watch or gaze at a distant mark, as in the chariot races, in order to not deviate from one's course, for it could be fatal, found only this time in the New Testament.

- 1) Literally to run along the marked out course. 1Cor. 9:24-25
- 2) The course God made for me will reveal every flaw, weakness and evil in my life and He enables me to run it, the question is, will I?
- b. The phrase press towards "dioko" is the same as in verse twelve, "press on", to pursue or bear down upon the direction of the goal for the prize, the goal.
- c. The goal and prize in this context I don't believe speak of our reward for the works we do for Christ. 1Cor. 3:11-15
- b. The goal and the prize is also not the laying hold of the works prepared for us though they will be the vehicle.
- c. The goal "scopos" speaks of here and now as the upward call of God in Christ Jesus to be more Christ-like from day to day being conformed into His image, the prize "brabeian" will be the culminate of being resurrected just like Him. vs. 10-11
- 1) The nature of the call is spiritual and divine not human accomplishments by the word upward.

- 2) The urgency is that I have been called of God, I have not called myself.
- 3) The potential accomplishment is "in Christ Jesus".
 - a) Paul told the Ephesian elders, "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." Acts 20:24
 - b) Paul declared his determined purpose for life at the end of his life, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, have kept the faith". 2Tim. 4:7

Illustration

Have you ever attempted to drive your car forward looking backwards? What do you think would happen and how far do you think you would get?

Application

1. The person believing they have arrived and achieved all God has for them is like the Corinthians, immature and canal, not spiritually mature.
 - a. Paul said, "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you

may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.” 1Cor. 4:6

- b. Paul said, “You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us--and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We *are* fools for Christ’s sake, but you *are* wise in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.” 1Cor. 4:8-11
- c. Paul again said, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.” 1Cor. 4:14

2. The past accomplishments are not the only thing that can hinder us from pressing forwards, but also past failures, be they events, disappointments or unforgiveness that causes bitterness, resentment and discouragement that become all sins that enslave us as we drag that dead corpse and try to run. Rom. 7:24-25

- a. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross,

despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Heb. 12:1-2

- b. “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” Heb. 12:12-17
 - c. James says, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.” Ja. 4:17
3. The believer is to be captivated all his life with the upward call of God in Christ Jesus to be more like Him, then receive his glorified body, just like His.
- a. Paul tells the Corinthians, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2Cor. 3:18
 - b. Paul taught the Thessalonians, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout,

with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1Thess. 4:16-17

These are the principles regarding spiritual maturity!

III. The persons regarding spiritual maturity. vs. 15-16

A. The apostle Paul first addressed the believer who is mature.

* “Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind.” vs. 15a-c

1. Paul included himself as one of the mature believers, but still needing ongoing maturity.

a. He comes to the conclusion of the subject of spiritual maturity.

1) The word therefore “oun” is a concluding word, could be translated wherefore or consequently.

2) In view of what I have stated about the believers spiritual maturity. vs. 12-14

b. He used the plural pronoun “us”.

1) The apostle Paul included himself among those who are spiritually mature.

2) He never exalted himself above any or lost sight of his need to be humble.

2. Paul used the word mature “teleios”, means full grown in contrast to childish ignorance.

a. He is referring to relative perfection in spiritual maturity that is ongoing OPPOSE to absolute perfection which he denied in verse twelve.

b. He knew there were many who were progressing, but he equally knew there were those who were not.

3. Paul indicated unless they had “this mind” about spiritual maturity and lived it out every day, maturity would stand still. vs. 12-14

a. The word mind “phroneo” means to have understanding, think or judge.

1) The tense is present active.

2) Every day and night.

b. Their minds were to be captivated with spiritual understanding declared by Paul.

1) First no believer lays hold of all things the minute they are born again. vs. 12a

2) Second no believer reaches a point in their life when they reach final maturity. vs. 12b

3) Third every believer is to press or pursue with passion to lay hold for the things Christ laid hold of them to accomplish. vs. 12c-d

- 4) Fourth every believer has to do “one thing every day that involves a three-fold process”.
 - a) Forgetting all things of the past that would hinder us from running the race, be it past sins, past blessings or failure as vessels of Jesus.
 - b) Reaching forward unhindered with every ounce of strength to be a partaker of the things that are ahead, like a runner stretched out to the finish line.
 - c) Pressing or pursuing with passion the marked out course for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus that will conform us more into His image and culminate in being resurrected just like Him.
 - c) They were to keep cultivating this spiritual understanding to captivate their thoughts and obey continuously.
 - d) This is part of the spiritual warfare.

B. The apostle addressed next the believer who thinks there is another way or that they have arrived, God would deal with their needed maturity. vs. 15d-e

* “and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you”.

1. Paul pointed out there would be those who would not agree on all he had said.

- a. The word think “phroneo” is the same as “mind”.
- b. The word otherwise “heteros”, means of a differently opinion.
2. Paul pointed out also there will be some who will ignore the Scriptures thinking they are the exception or think they know better.
 - a. Not acknowledging the authority and objective truth of the word of God.
 - b. Ignoring the warning and instructions, thinking they are the exception.
3. Paul pointed out that if they were sincere God would reveal the truth of His word.
 - 1) The word reveal “apokalupto”, means to uncover what has been veiled to be seen and understood as God’s truth, the indicative future active tense.
 - 2) Jesus said God’s will is verified by God’s words! Jn. 17:17
- C.** The apostle addressed the responsibility of every member to walk in the maturity according to their age. vs. 16
 1. Paul declared spiritual maturity should always mark the believer in proportion to age, “Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained.” vs. 16a-b
 - a. The word degree is in italic to indicate it is not found in the text, but applied to give a clearer understanding.

- b. The indication is to conduct oneself to the level of maturity they had come to as a believer.
 - 1) The phrase already attained “phthano”, means to come or arrived at, indicated by the aorist active tense.
 - 2) The level of spiritual maturity differs from one person to another.
- 2. Paul declared spiritual maturity always has this principle and all believer’s are to walk according to be in agreement. “let us walk by the same rule.” vs. 16c
 - a. The word walk “stoicheo”, means to proceed in a row as a march of a soldier.
 - 1) Walking lined up together in file in the same direction, according to each person’s maturity.
 - 2) A present active tense.
 - b. The word rule “kanon”, means a rod or straight piece of wood that something is tied to keep it straight.
 - 1) The word is used for a measuring line or a carpenter’s measuring tape.
 - 2) We get our word “canon” the straight measure of the Scriptures.
 - c. This is the ruling principle for life in the Spirit to be transformed into Christ-likeness
- 3. Paul declared spiritual maturity should be understood by all believers that there are

various levels at every age of our spiritual life, “let us be of the same mind”. vs. 16d

- a. He includes all believer “let us”, including himself again.
- b. He used the same word again for mind “phroneo”, to have understanding, think or judge. vs. 15

Illustration

What a joy when a family gathers and there are infants, children, young adults, parents, Grandparents, Great-Grandparents, all acting according to their age.
 * What a benefit it brings to each person in the family, having the example of different levels of maturity, but how embarrassing and lack of benefit if each did not act according to their age!

Application

- 1. Are you a spiritual infant or young child in the church? We will put up with your crying and your colloquy times be patient and care for you.
 - a. It is a legitimate stage and a joy to have you.
 - b. But you need to grow, develop and mature spiritually, first crawling then walking.
 - c. You need to take heed to the warnings of God believe and obey Him.
 - * “As newborn **babes**, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious.” 1Pet. 2:2-3

2. Are you a young adult or adult? We know you are not perfect, but we will instruct you, expect you to walk with Jesus and be strong.
 - a. Be a doer of the word.
 - b. Be an example of the believer.
 - c. Be aware of the evil of your flesh, the world and the devil.
 - * John said, “I write to you, young men,
Because you have overcome the wicked one,
are strong, and the word of God abides in
you, And you have overcome the wicked
one.” 1Jn. 2:13d-f, 14f-h
3. Are you a father, then we expect much from you.
 - a. You are an example to all in the church.
 - b. The soiritual young children, young adults and adults look to you.
 - * “I write to you, **fathers**, Because you have
known Him *who is* from the beginning.”
1Jn. 2:13a-c

These are the persons regarding spiritual maturity!

Conclusion

The believer’s practical sanctification is an ongoing process of spiritual maturity throughout life, not a product of perfection in this life characterized by these three things.

- I. The perspective regarding spiritual maturity!
- II. The principles regarding spiritual maturity!
- III. The persons regarding spiritual maturity!