***Forget your Failures - PH73-02  
  
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 3:12-14***

One of the things that it is necessary for us to understand about God concerning the Christian life is that we could not know anything at all about Him if He did not inform us Himself. Unless we had a revelation from God, we would not know anything about Him at all. A very small fringe bit of information comes from natural revelation. Basically, we know things about God because He has told us something about Himself. This is the principle which is laid out in 1 Corinthians 4:7, when the apostle Paul said, "For who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive?"

This principle of having only what we receive applies to everything that you and I are as a human being. Human beings have very few instincts. People, unlike animals, do not function on instincts. People function on learned behavior patterns. So when a baby comes into the world, he cannot instinctively use a language. We have case histories on record of people who have been reared without the presence of communication. They grew up never hearing a person speak a language, and those people were never able to communicate verbally. Unless somebody teaches you a language, you will never learn to speak. You will have grunts and you will have emotions, but you will not be able to communicate verbally. Unless somebody teaches you a language, you will never know it.

The same is true concerning spiritual things. This is the same principle of 1 Corinthians 4:7. The only reason you know a language is because someone has given it to you. The only reason you know anything about God is because someone has delivered that information to you. If you deny yourself access to that information, you will never know anything about God. This is just as if you denied yourself access to hearing somebody speak a language, so that you could learn it, you'd never know how to speak. You would never come to a language. Adam didn't know how to talk until God taught him a language. You do not get anything except what you receive from another.

So God, knowing this, of course, has given us the revelation of Himself, which is recorded in the Bible. This revelation will enable a lost person to learn how to be born again spiritually and enter into the family of God forever. Unless you have this revelation, you will *never* know how to be born again. You will come to the point of God consciousness through natural revelation, and that's as far as you will go. Then, unless God comes through and gives you information, you will never go beyond that. The revelation that God has given us enables a believer to enter a daily experience of relationship with the living God – the power of God in your daily experience.

So, like language, which we must learn from another, divine viewpoint we must learn from another. For this reason, God, in His mercy, has provided us with a system, the grace system of perception, which does exactly that. This is a grace system, meaning that everybody is on an equal ground. God the Holy Spirit, our ultimate teacher, is the only one who can give us information on spiritual things. But God has not left us to ourselves. It is important to understand that if you are not learning divine viewpoint, you're learning human viewpoint from someone else. You are learning something. "What do you have that you did not receive?" Everything you have, you've gotten from somebody else. You do not have anything that you have not received.

You may be arrogant enough to say, "Well, listen. I've got some brains, and I've thought some things through, and I've gotten in life where I am because I've got some smarts." I'm going to tell you that you wouldn't even have the capacity to keep your brain working and to keep those smarts functioning if it wasn't for the grace of God that kept your metabolism operating in your body so that your brain could work. You don't have anything but what you have received from another. That's the way the system works. It is your opportunity to use this system in this session today to enter into some very critical information that will bring monumental happiness into your life.

We have seen that the apostle Paul has rejoiced in the fact of his salvation, and that he did know God in his daily experience. However, while Paul had gone on to a super grace level of Christianity (that is spiritual maturity in the five facets fully developed), he did not claim to be sinlessly perfect. In Philippians 3:12, the apostle Paul has made it clear that he did not presume to have arrived at ultimate perfection – that is, the point where the old sin nature was no longer operational within him. Paul claimed positional sanctification. He is in Christ, so he is, in God's eyes, just as perfect as Jesus Christ. His perfection, in this way, makes heaven a certainty, but he is not sinless. And he doesn't want us to misunderstand him, when he claims to have experienced the power of the resurrected Christ working in his daily experience, that he is suggesting that he is sinless.

Paul is working at this point in his life, just as you and I are, on relative perfection. We are making progress in spiritual maturity. We are building our spiritual maturity structure, or we are maintaining it at a mature, developed level. Paul wants us to realize that all that God has planned for us is available to us. Paul says, "I want to enter into everything that God reached down and saved me for in the first place." The words that are used here in our text in the Greek language indicate that Jesus Christ actually seized Paul for a purpose, just as He has seized each of us for a purpose. Paul says, "I want to pursue and to seize that same goal."

So Paul pursues experiential perfection. This has been interrupted, in his case, by four years of imprisonment due to an experience of backsliding on the part of the apostle Paul, where he fooled around with an experience of legalism, four years prior to writing this book back in Jerusalem. But he's back on his way again. He has corrected the error, and he is moving ahead. The great hazard, we pointed out to you last week, in continuing in spiritual maturity, is the fact that you may come to the point in life where you think that you can coast along on your past knowledge of the Word of God – on past Bible study. This sets up a condition for reversionism (spiritual retrogression). Your very capacity to enjoy life is a great temptation to you to begin neglecting church attendance.

And I'm here to tell you that people who do not attend church on Sunday are going to have a very hard time going forward spiritually. And one of the things about being spiritually retarded is that you don't know that you are spiritually retarded. A person who is in a condition of mental retardation doesn't know he's mentally retarded. He's oblivious to that fact. So why you may say, "I challenge your statement that if I don't attend church services, I can't go on in spiritual maturity and in my Christian life," it is because you are not aware of your own condition. The Word of God makes it very clear that unless you feed upon the Word of God, you will suffer spiritual malnutrition, and the experience that is described in the Word of God is the experience of moving backward in the Christian life, while you think that you are moving forward.

So Paul pursues his experiential perfection. We may be tempted not to pursue that because we foolishly permit our capacity to enjoy life, which Bible doctrine does give us, to squeeze out time for taking in the Word from the pastor-teacher. So we exhaust ourselves with economic things; with social reasons; and, for ambitious reasons. We exhaust ourselves to such a degree that we have no capacity for attending the study of the Word of God. The result is spiritual failure that will astound you and that will humiliate you, and that will totally incapacitate you as a believer. So the apostle Paul knew that he had not arrived spiritually because he was well aware of his moments of spiritual failure. He was in the midst of the end of one such failure at the time that he was writing this book. This is true of all of us, though some Christians really don't care.

So the question is, what is the divine viewpoint method for handling the failures? We do fail. Paul failed. Some Christians know how to handle their failures, and others simply collapse. That's a tragedy. Today, you may have an experience of spiritual failure in your background. If you're a normal Christian, you do. You may look upon that with a great deal of guilt. You may look upon that with a great deal of self-pity. You may look upon that as an excuse for retirement from Christian service. There is a right way to handle your spiritual breakdowns, and there is a very wrong way to handle them.

**Forget Your Past Failures**

So we pick up the account in Philippians 3:13. In the first part of the verse, Paul says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have arrived." He is saying, "I count not myself to have grasped hold upon spiritual perfection." Instead, he says, "I'm aware that I have been a failure at some points. So what do I do about it? Here is a critical principle from the Word of God, which you must learn. Paul says, "But this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before."

The word "but" is the Greek word "de," which here means "on the other hand." There is another word that is often associated with "de," which is the word "men." These two little words we've had before, and as you may remember, they signal a contrast. On the one hand, this is true; but, on the other hand, this is true. So the "de" here is giving us the conclusion, on the other hand, to a previous understood "men." We don't actually have this word in the Greek text this time, but it is understood. Paul says, "I don't think I have arrived. I don't think that I am sinlessly perfect. I don't think I'm everything I should be. But on the other hand, I will tell you something about myself."

There is no "this" in the Greek. It's simply a very cryptic expression: "But one thing." "I don't think I've arrived, but one thing," he says. "One thing" is the Greek word "hen," which is simply the word for "one." Again, there is no verb. There is no "one thing I do." "I do" is not in the Greek. He's just talking in clipped fashion in order to stress his point: "I don't think I've arrived spiritually, but one thing." Then he proceeds to give us the one thing.

The keyword is "forgetting." In the Greek, it is the word "epilanthanomai." "Epilanthanomai" comes from two Greek words. "Epi," which is the first part, means "upon." That is added to emphasize the main part of this verb which is "lanthano," which means "to forget." So that equals a very important concept – to forget completely. "Epi" comes down hard. I am bearing down upon an attitude of mind which is to forget – forgetting completely.

This word is used in the sense of neutralizing something in terms of this thing having any effect on your life. It does not mean that you will not have a memory of something. So when was the last time that you were humiliated as a Christian? When was the last time that you were guilty of something that you're not very proud of in the way of a sin? When was the last time that you were guilty of something that you really didn't think that you could be guilty of? When was the last time that immorality invaded your life? When was the last time that you violated one of the ten principles of freedom expressed in the Ten Commandments? No matter how bad it was; how gross it was; or, how extensive it was, the first principle for handling it is to forget it – completely. After confession has been made of the sin, and the forgiveness thus automatically received, the thing to do with it is to forget it.

**Mental Health**

You will remember that the apostle Paul, all of his life, with a certain sadness, remembered how many Christians he had killed when he was persecuting the church. He remembered how many Christians he literally had murdered. It was not a pleasant and a happy memory, but it was one that he forgot in terms of its effect upon his life. It was a thing he put aside, and that's what this means. This word "epilanthanomai" means to neutralize the thing in your life so that it cannot have any effect upon you whatsoever. While the memory may be there, the memory will not cause any guilt feelings. The memory will not cause you to be depressed. The memory will not cause any frustration. The memory will not incapacitate you in your Christian service. This is in the present tense. It was Paul's constant attitude about his past – to forget it. It is middle, which means that Paul benefits himself by completely setting aside the past. It is participle. It's a principle stated for maintaining mental health.

Now, if you want to drive yourself nuts, just violate this principle right here. Here you have in the Word of God a principle (a critical gem) for attaining mental health. When you do something that's wrong, and when you do something that violates your conscience, and God strikes at your conscience and burdens your heart until confession is made, once you have confessed it, then the next step is neutralizing the sin. Don't just start series sinning by lighting one sin from the next sin like a bunch of Christmas tree lights hooked up in series, so that from one sin you light another sin, because you keep going into a guilt complex; you keep burdening yourself; and, you keep being depressed over the fact that you were guilty of such a thing. Paul says it is a principle of mental good health, and a benefit to you personally (middle voice) to forget the thing that you were guilty of.

It says, "Those things." It has the definite article "to." "Those things which are behind ("opiso"). Paul is referring here to the things that he once possessed as a respected religious celebrity – when he was a zealous persecutor of Christians. He said, "I'm going to forget all of that. I'm going to forget what a superstar I once was with people." Paul is also referring to himself in the terms of his sins as a Christian. He says, "I'm going to forget that. I'm going to forget all about the retrogression that brought me into prison for four years that I'm suffering from now – those years that I have been incapacitated from being out there in the field of the work." He said, "I'm forgetting that. I'm putting that behind me now."

Paul remembers the past, but he does not brood over it. Forward progress in the Christian life is retarded when you look at the past. You don't forget the good things of the past. You don't forget the happy moments. But the things that would keep you from moving on in your Christian life are to be set aside. Paul follows the Bible doctrine principle of confessing sins, forgetting the failures, and moving on with the Lord. That's the key. Confess, forget, and move on. That's the formula. That equals inner happiness in a maximum way. Confess, forget and move on.

It makes no difference whether other people are willing to forget your sins or not. You say, "Well, I'd like to forget them. My wife doesn't let me forget, though. She keeps reminding me of it." Well, that makes no difference. Some of those sweet church friends of yours won't let you forget your past either. You've had a run in with them, and they let you know about that every time you see them – maybe not in words, but how they cool you, and how they act toward you. They're telling you that they're not forgetting. Well, that's beside the point. It's not important whether other people forget. It's only important whether you forget. It's not important whether they hold it against you. It's only important whether you hold it against yourself.

It's true that Satan will use your friends; he will use your church members; he will use your marriage partner; and, he will use anyone to keep you from bouncing back into operational fellowship. Anytime somebody does not let you forget your past weaknesses and failures and sins, it is because Satan is using that individual. Anytime anybody just mentions it, you immediately know that you are hearing the voice of his majesty the devil coming out of that mouth. Now, learn that. Anytime anybody mentions any past mistakes and failures on your part (any past sin), you know the devil is doing it.

God never reminds us of our past failures. He says that He forgives us when we confess and He removes that sin as far as East is from the West, He never brings it up again. If you bring it up again, it's the devil that you're responding to – not God. So some of you who pride yourself on being the keeper of other people's righteousness, you've got nothing to be proud of. All you are is being the keeper of the devil's trouble, and you are responding to his leadership.

The reason the devil uses people to do this is because if he can throw up your failures to you, he'll create a guilt feeling in you, if you don't understand the principle of forgetting completely the things that are behind. There are some things that God cannot do. One thing that God cannot do is bless a Christian who is shot through with guilt feelings. You will never have the blessing of God upon you when you have feelings of guilt over the past.

After all, I want you to remember that the person who throws up your failure is talking to you who are a worm. But don't forget that he's a worm also. So here you've got two earthworms looking at each other, eyeball to eyeball, reminding each other that through them flows dirt. They've been eating the dirt, and the dirt has been passing through. If you ever get a worm, you can look at him. You can see this black stuff going through him. So here you have the picture of two worms who are facing each other and saying, "You know, you're just full of dirt. I can see your dirt." Well, don't you ever forget that you can see his dirt, too, if you have a mind to do it.

Or perhaps you spend the time comparing each other's garbage cans. Some people do. Our secretary of state recently was very upset because some reporter checked his garbage cans just to see what he was doing. He found a lot of booze bottles, and so on, and he said, "Oh, that's what he's doing." So if you want to know what's going on in your neighbor's life, check his garbage can. You'll discover a lot of things about him. You might even want to pick something out; knock on his door; and, say, "Hey, look what I found in your garbage can. That's what you've been up to." It's not important if he wants to rummage around in your garbage can.

One of the teachers said to me, "I just got onto three kids in the academy." I said "Why?" She said, "They were in the garbage bin, digging around. Somebody said there was something valuable in there, and they jumped in to see if they could find it. It is not uncommon for people to dig in garbage cans. But the important thing is for you not to dig into your own garbage cans. Let them dig into the garbage cans. Let them dig in yours or anybody else's that they want to. Just don't you get into the habit of joining the diggers. Remember that no one else can set aside your spiritual fellowship. You have to do your own confessing. You have to do your own forgetting. You have to do your own moving on. Only you can neutralize the effects of sin in your life.

The apostle Paul, had he not responded to this biblical principle, would not have written some of the major books of the Bible. He would have sat there in Rome so discouraged and so shot through with frustration, guilt, and depression, that he would not have had the interest to pick up his pen and start writing the magnificent books of the New Testament that were written from that prison cell. Do you know why he could do it? Because he went on with the Lord once more in fellowship. He forgot the thing that was behind him. He forgot the failure that had brought him to that point.

So what I'm saying, dear friend, is for you, on the basis of this biblical principle, to leave your garbage with God, and don't dig around in your own can, or anybody else's. Forget the failure. That's part of the faith rest technique. Faith rest permits you to use God's principle of confession and accept his forgiveness by faith, and to rest upon it. The Christian who remember spiritual failures of himself and of others is a carnal Christian. He's in spiritual reversionism. He's under emotional domination in his soul. He has calluses on the facets of his soul, and he is completely insensitive to God.

So anytime you want to go around and present a pious front that you just feel so deeply about people who do wrong things, just you remember that anybody who has heard this message this morning is not going to be conned by you. They're going to look upon you as you bring up these shortcomings and sins of other people, and they're going to know that you're just a poor, pathetic, emotionally dominated character; callused on the soul; in reversionism; shot through with cardinality; and, that God is not using you, but Satan is having a field day with you.

So once you understand this principle, you're going to be able to tell a lot about yourself, if you choose to go around to make issue over other people's sins. So stay out of the garbage cans. The Bible doctrine principle is, "Never look back. Keep moving on." All the idiots in the Christian life are going to keep looking back, and they're going to try looking back for you as well as for themselves. But don't you join them. Let them suffer the consequences of their own looking back.

**The Effects of not Forgetting**

Here are the effects of remembering. It has effects upon our soul. In your mind, it caused you to remember the past sin, and as sure as you're alive, the next thing you'll do with remembering past sins is to associate it with something that's happening to you. How many times have you heard some poor, pathetic Christians say, "Well, I'm going through this trial now. God is disciplining me because of what I did back there?"

You say, "Well, have you confessed that?" They say, "Oh, yes, I confessed what I did, but He is disciplining me for it." If something is the consequence of what you have done in the past, and you have confessed it, then that thing is no longer discipline. It is a blessing. If it is not a blessing to you, it is because you're looking at it wrong. In all likelihood, it has nothing to do with the past at all. God does not punish us for things that we have confessed. That's what the Bible says. The Bible says, "If we will confess it, He will not punish us." The Bible says, "If we would discipline ourselves through confession, He will not discipline us. If He chooses to do it, it's because He is going to teach us something, and He is going to bring blessing into our life by doing that. Do not think that God punishes you for your past. But if you are of the kind that keeps remembering the past, that's exactly what you will come up with. In your emotions, you'll be depressed. You'll have guilt feelings over your sins. In your will, you'll decide to do something to make up for your sins. So you'll rush off into a pattern of do-goodism. You'll rush off into some kind of pattern of self-denial and crucifixion.

I hope all of you know that we are now in the Lenten season, and that you are supposedly to be deeply in the spirit of self-denial. Some say that you can make a lot of points with God now if you'll just quit doing something you like. What do you like to do? I like to kiss my wife. Don't do it for 40 days now and God will be so pleased with you.

"Oh," you say, "that's ridiculous." No, it isn't. That's the mentality of a guilt complex oriented person. That's the mentality of a person who comes to a season like Lent, and he listens to all this guff in the religious world that tells him, "Now, if you'll do something special during this time, God will really reward you." He begins looking at himself and says, "Boy, I need some reward from God as bad as I am." There are thousands of preachers in thousands of churches who are capitalizing on the guilt complexes in people by playing on that during the Lenten season. It'll have an effect on your soul. It will also have the long-range effects that a guilt complex has, in that you can't enjoy anything in life, because you're waiting for the next blow to fall from God for what you did it. It will keep you out of temporal fellowship. Therefore, you have no divine guidance in your life. A guilt complex will create spiritual calluses on your soul, so that you'll be insensitive to God the Holy Spirit. You'll be insensitive to people. It's conducive to practicing other mental sins, so you make things worse. Out of this guilt complex flow other sins of the mind.

The result will be that you as a Christian may go psychotic. You'll go to a psychiatrist, and he'll try his humanistic ways to blot out your guilt complex. He'll give you drugs, he'll give you shock treatment. He'll give you some kind of humanistic therapy in order to blot out what God says, "I've already provided you with the means to do." Your guilt complex will cause you to resort to gossip, and to maligning others in order to relieve your own guilt. You'll try group therapy. You may even try some public confession. You'll blame others for the fact that you're unhappy for your disoriented condition. You'll become overly sensitive – the suspicious type. You'll think that everybody you see is talking about you. Why? Because you've got a guilt complex. You go to a baseball game, and the catcher goes out to talk to the pitcher, and you know that they're talking about you. That's what happens when you don't forget the things that are behind. Of course, the ultimate is to pursue some good soul-ringing emotional orgy to relieve the memory of your failure, because you will not yield to God's principle of forgetting the past.

**Learning Patterns**

So forgetting is very important. However, if you are going to forget, forgetting requires certain changes. So let's see how we can put this into a practical effect to forget our past and to move on with God. Jeremiah 13:23 raises a very important point. Jeremiah says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin (the color of his skin) or the leopard his spots? Then you also may do good who are accustomed to do evil." The word "accustomed" means those who are learned in evil. What Jeremiah is saying here is that it is not easy to change our patterns – our learned life patterns, and especially those that are bad. It is not easy to change our habits. There are plenty of people who say, "Oh, yes, I've forgotten those things, but I find myself doing them again."

This passage of Scripture in Jeremiah is talking about more than just the fact that we have an old sin nature. It is talking about our learning certain patterns in life as well. The refusal to forget the past, and to do better in the future, is excused often by claiming, "Well, that' just how I am. That's just the way I am." That is confusing the fact that we have nothing but what we have received (learned patterns) with an inherited sin nature. It is true that our sin nature inclines us to do evil. It inclines us to learn evil patterns of behavior. However, what we learn, we can unlearn. The way you do that is by the intake of a totally different viewpoint, and that viewpoint is God's viewpoint. Any quality that God asks of us, he also makes possible for us to practice in our lives. He makes it possible for us to acquire any good quality that He requires of us.

How does He do that? It starts with regeneration. That's the basic principle. That's the basic groundwork. Then we have the indwelling power of the Spirit of God, but He can't do it. As you pour Bible doctrine into your mentality, the Spirit of God will change your spots. That's the only way you'll change it. So I will agree that if you think you're going to just forget by some sheer willpower, you will not forget. If you keep repeating the pattern of sin, obviously you won't forget it. Forgetting it involves not doing it anymore. And not doing something means changing your patterns. That's why you do it in the first place.

The Bible removes the sense of guilt by changing the patterns through doctrine. Then you are able to move on. Then you are able really to forget. If you focus on the past, you will not be able to change your pattern of spiritual failure. Nobody can change the past. Actually, the past doesn't even exist anymore. If you're going to change your life patterns, that means you have to change the person that you are within. If you are going to forget your past failures, it involves changing what you are as a person. That's the point. So the fabric of what you are determines what you do, and the fabric of what you are is determined by the intake of doctrine into your soul. This change in what we actually are is the basic requirement of forgetting the past. The past exists, in a way, as the present, in consequences of past acts. Therefore, the thing that you should deal with is the present.

There is no remark that can be more stupid than, "What could have been if I had only done this. How did I ever get into this situation? I'm so sick and tired of my life." So you're looking at the very thing that Paul is saying, "Don't look at the past. Forget the past." If you are not happy with what your circumstances are (your situation in life), then look at where you are. Look at the thing that you are unhappy with, and then change the patterns that develop that unhappiness. If you don't like how something takes place in your life, or if some procedure in your home is distasteful to you, then say, "How does this procedure come about? I'm looking at the thing as it is, and I'm going to change the patterns that create this thing."

Paul says, "We are to focus our minds and our efforts on the present, not on the past. The past makes the present, so get with the present, and then you will have your future the way it should be. Merely discontinuing a practice is not enough. You may say, "Yes, I forget that. I'm never going to be guilty of that act of thievery again. I'm through lying. I'm through with adultery. I'm going to forget it." Then you say, "I can't forget it, because here I am doing it again."

That's a mistake to think that if a liar quits lying for a while, he's no longer a liar. And if a thief quits stealing for a while, then he's no longer a thief. Until the basic fabric of life is changed through the Word of God, he's still a thief; he's still a liar; and he's still an adulterer. So if you want to change your present, which is the result of what you've been in the past, then concentrate on what you are now, and change the fabric of yourself through the intake of the Word of God. Then you'll be amazed how the lying will lose its taste; how stealing will no longer appeal to you; and, how the immorality will be discontinued. This is the divine pattern that Paul is speaking of here that is involved in the principle of forgetting the past.

The Greek has the word "men" with forgetting: "One thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind." That's on the one hand, again, making a contrast. The question is, "Well, what do you do then, Paul? You've changed the fabric of your life. You have truly forgotten by changing what you are. What do you do? And then he signals to us what he does by the accompanying "de:" "On the other hand, reaching forward to those things which are before." "Reaching forth is the Greek word "epekteino." "Epekteino" comes from "epi" (upon), and "ekteino" (to stretch out), and it is the word which is used in the Greek language to describe a man who was in the Olympic Games in a foot race, who was stretching out and straining running down the course toward the goal line. This was described as an act of "epekteino."

It is present. Paul says, "My constant effort is stretching out like a runner in a race, reaching forward." Its middle. It's to my benefit. Its participle. A principle here is stated. This pressing forward is not through some renewed effort on Paul's part, but he presses forward by taking in the principles of the Word of God, and acting upon them. This is positive response – letting the Spirit of God lead him in accordance with the word that he understands. Paul has been through all of this. He knows how to get out of the race. He knows how to run the race.

So he says, "I am not perfect. I have not arrived at sinless perfection. But I'll tell you one thing. I'm changing the fabric of my life by taking in the Word of God so that I am able to forget the past. I am not allowing the past to neutralize me in the present. Instead, I'm on the course, and I am running with every muscle straining in me toward a goal line." He says, "Unto those things which are before." "Those things before" are the "emprosthen." The word "emprosthen" is used to indicate a position. The position here is in front – those which are ahead of him in his life. Paul, in other words, looks to the future for what the grace of God can do to make him into the thing for which God seized him in the first place. That is to be a winner.

So we may translate verse 13 in this way: "Brethren, as for myself, I do not yet regard myself as having laid hold of it (the thing for which I was designed by Christ), but one thing I do. I am forgetting completely the things that are behind, and I am stretching forward to the things that are in front."

Verse 14 tells us what he is stretching forward to. He says, "I press." That is the Greek word "dioko." We've had that word before, and it means "to pursue," or "to bear down on." His feet are pounding the track and his muscles are straining, and he's pushing forward toward the goal line. This is present tense. Paul says, "This is my constant life pattern. It is active – my choice. It is indicative – a statement of fact. "I am pressing toward." The word "toward" is "kata." This little preposition actually means "down." So here, it connotes the idea of "bearing down" upon something.

And what he bears down upon, he calls the "skopos" – "the mark." The mark is something you fix your eye on. It's the goal line. It's the string that's held out there at the end of the course of the footrace. Paul looks, and this is all he sees. His eyes are not on the past. He is changing the present by having taken in the Word of God, so that when the present becomes the past, the apostle Paul will be a different kind of person. He will be the person that Jesus Christ seized him and planned for him to be. He does this by keeping his eye on that goal.

What is the goal? "I press toward the mark for." The word "for" is the Greek word "eis" which means "unto." It is a directional word. "I am going unto the prize." The prize is "brabeion." The word "brabeion" means "to the award." This word is used one other place in the Bible. It is only used twice. 1 Corinthians 9:24 is the other place. Here the apostle Paul uses it in this way. He says, "Don't you know that they who run in a race, they all run, but one receives the 'brabeion' (the prize)? So run that you may obtain." What Paul is connoting here is a reward as the result of his life. Actually, this word was also used in the Greek language to describe a reward as a result of conflict. So the apostle Paul is saying, "You run the race of the Christian life as if God were going to reward only one Christian out of all the millions. Only one person is going to win." You determined that you're going to be that winner.

The winner in the Greek world, you know, receive a garland – leaves which were woven into a crown. These crowns were made of oak; ivy; parsley; myrtle; olive; or, laurel leaves. They made a crown which was called a "stephanos." This is the word from which we get one of our English names, "Stephen." "Stephanos" meant a victor's crown. "Stephanos" was the crown that represented victory. What the apostle Paul has his eyes on is this victor's crown. This is available to Paul no matter what the past was. This is the prize that must preoccupy his attention.

What is this prize? "The prize of the high calling." The word "high" is "ano," and it should be translated "upward." This is the prize which consists of the upward calling – the "klesis." The word "klesis" connotes an invitation. "The upward calling of God in Christ Jesus." The prize that Paul seeks is attached to this upward calling. What is this upward calling? Well, this upward calling is the rapture call that we have in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

It may be that Paul is referring to the imagery which was used in a Greek race. When a person won an athletic contest, the judges were in an elevated position. When the crown of laurel leaves was placed upon his head as a symbol of his victory, it was not done down on the floor of the stadium. Instead, they called the winning contestant up to the judge's stand, and there they placed it upon him. The apostle Paul may have that picture in mind, because Paul was very athletically oriented, that he may be describing here for us the very imagery in the Greek games that the winner now is called up to the judge, which is exactly what happens to you and me. As Christians, we are brought up before the "bema" seat – the Judgment Seat of Christ, where we receive the victor's crown, which represents the rewards for our service as believers.

So the apostle Paul says, "All earthly rewards and failures are temporary in nature. They have no significance in heaven whatsoever." But he says, "I'm going to run this race in such a way with my eye on one thing – when I'm called up there to receive my crown." In 1 Corinthians 9:25, the apostle Paul says, "And every man that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to attain a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible." Paul says after the games are over, and everybody has cheered you, and you've been a victor in the stadium, they give you a little wreath of leaves that they put on your head. The thing withers and finally crumbles away, and it's gone. But I'm going to have something that is incorruptible. All my earthly rewards are going to be forgotten. All my earthly failures are going to be forgotten. Paul says, "Why should I look back? Why should I not forget, and keep my eye on that goal line – the upward calling of the rapture, with all that that connotes to me as a believer. This is the calling of God the Father in Christ Jesus." It's all of grace. It's because of our position in Him.

"As I bear down upon the goal unto the prize, which consists of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus." For Paul, this will mean ultimate perfection (sinlessness). It will mean a resurrection body – no more pain, and no more death. It will mean being face-to-face with Jesus Christ. It will mean enjoyment of rewards given to him for his Christian service. It will mean perfect happiness – no more sorrow, and no more tears.

Now what it meant for Paul, it can also mean for you and me. So we commend to you this principle: Whatever the past has been, forget it. Confess, and move on. If you do that, you can't help but be a winner.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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