



This Week in the Word

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.



Renounce all for Christ **Study Scripture: Philippians 3:7-16**

Lesson 10, February 2, 2019

Key Verse

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13 - 14

INTRODUCTION

Personal testimony of one's commitment to a cause is an essential ingredient for those who are advocates for God and those who would seek to have others join them in their particular pursuits. Christians have been told time and time again that they are advocates for Christ and are mandated to spread the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. A ready, personal testimony is an important asset in the Christian's tool kit in spreading the gospel. But in this Study Scripture we are told that there is more to the Christian life than that. There are certain essentials and there are certain goals the pursuit of which should dominate the life of every Christian.

In this lesson the Apostle Paul goes to great length by using language and using repetition to have us recognize that the chief aim in life is to "**know**" Christ, to be so close to Him and to be "**in Him**": that one experiences the essential features in the life of Christ. In fact, when we are told that we must "**know Him**", this is a term which deals with extremely close intimacy. As well says the Apostle, Christians must know and experience the "**power of His resurrection**" and the "**Fellowship of His suffering**".

He gives us much practical advice and certainly points us in the right direction and away from being deceived into thinking that Christianity consists of Christ plus something else. The Apostle makes sure that he defines his terms, what he's talking about. As such he

makes it very clear that many of the things that people think are advantages and that men consider to be “gain” are in reality “losses”.

Paul for our benefit, accordingly clearly outlines things that previously motivated him and gave him confidence, showing us that all these things were things which gave him a false confidence. But now, radically transformed, he worshiped God in spirit, gloried Jesus Christ, and had no confidence in the ‘flesh’, rejecting the principle of self-effort which characterizes much of the activity in the world. These he insists have absolutely no value when compared to that which Jesus Christ gives.

In fact, he invites the believers to continually keep and demonstrate their confidence in Jesus Christ, for their confidence does not end with this life, given the fact that they were looking for a city, a country in heaven, from which they awaited the coming of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is from heaven that He would come to change our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body through His resurrection power.

Paul wants the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord for that was what would keep them or safeguard them through the danger and emergencies ahead. It was their deep love and a joyous response to do the things of Christ that would allow them to remain in the process which would protect them from the coming emergency, the work of the evil workers, the vile or base wrongdoers which he called the “dogs”.

Those false teachers would teach confidence in the ‘flesh’. They sought to bring in the subtle love for human accomplishment which would turn believers away from the truth of salvation in Christ alone. They would have believers chase after special titles, influence, accomplishments or merit, instead of focusing on the great advantages brought alone by Jesus' death on the cross.

So in this Lesson Paul stresses the surpassing value of knowing Christ. He called on all professing believers to be in Christ, to have the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ, for that “righteousness” was the means which would lead them to desire and to have an intimate knowledge of the Lord. The Apostle tells us that when one comes to Christ and knows Christ there is a complete reversal of values that they have learned from the time that they were children. There had to be a complete change in the mind of thinking and attitudes.

It must be noted here therefore that this makes Christian growth somewhat difficult. But in fact if there is to be adequate Christian living there must be this reversal of values. One writer reminds us:

“A conversion is not the end of the road; it is but the beginning. It isn't even the major part of the process. It's the entry, the gate into it. Sometimes we talk about our conversion, and certainly of Paul's, as though everything was learned at conversion. No, that was just the beginning. Our conversion is entrance into a new version of life, and I think we make too much of Paul's conversion. I know the opponents of Christianity have tried to explain that experience as an epileptic seizure Paul experienced. I think of Charles Spurgeon's reaction in London when he heard that.

He said, “Oh, blessed epilepsy. Would that every man in London could have epilepsy like that”.

So we are now to face the question:

Have you ever sat down to list your assets, your background, your family name, your family standing, your money, your fame, your education, your physical assets?

Have you ever listed the things that are important to you, things that you think you could not do without?

How do you think you can get respect, fame, recognition, and acceptance in the eyes of the world?.

Have you ever experienced Christ, sensing His life flowing through yours, to work in you, demonstrating to the world how much He could do through you?

How do you think your life would change if you considered that every loss you suffered was an opportunity to gain Christ?

Have you ever thought that you could use any dissatisfaction in life as a motivation to pursue Christ?

Have you ever wanted to be in an “intimate” relationship with Christ, to connect deeply with Him in every fibre of your being, so that there is a passionate cry coming from your heart?

Do you think you're living the story of Christ with **your** heart breaking for a broken world, or is there a desire for advancing the things of Christ but with your contemplation and your actions being separated or even mutually exclusive?

In other words, do you look for Christ everywhere, as one writer says in your “being “and in your “doing” .

One writer challenges us to see what Paul means in this Scripture passage. Examine yourself to see if you are doing what he is recommending::

“Find Him in the Scriptures. Find Him in your prayers. Find Him in your passions. Find Him in your dreams. Find Him in your tears. Find Him when feelings of melancholy overtake your heart. Find Him when a memory produces a wistful sigh. Find Him in your deep desires for sexual intimacy. Find Him on the mountains and in the valleys, in the rivers and in the deserts. Find Him in the crash of a wave and in the cry of an eagle. Find Him in the stunning colours and subtle hues of a sunrise or a sunset. Find Him in the way droplets of dew capture the sunlight. Find Him in the first instance you notice a change in seasons... Find Him in the smile of a child and the tears of an orphan. Find Him in the glow of a bride and the despair of the homeless. Find Him in the joy of a grandfather and the sadness of a widow. Find Him in the living, and find Him in the dying. Find Him with your eyes, your nose, your hands, and your imagination. Let what you take in stir your heart and carry you to Christ”

You might never have thought about it in this way but if you are “in Christ” and Christ is living His life through you, showing the world who He is, the complexity of your experiences in life will show in how you see the world and life and how the world sees you.

Remember now we are looking at the deep things of the Spirit of God. We are moving away from the “milk” to the “meat”.

In Philippians Chapter 3, in very blunt and direct language the apostle recalled his 'considerable' and eminent assets and qualifications for God's approval, prior to his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ in Acts 9. Among what we might call his pearls was his impeccable Jewish credentials, from a ranking tribe, morality, unmatched zeal for the law and belonging to the upper echelon of Jewish society.

Paul looked at the salvation process from his standpoint as a sort of transaction and all the things of his life mentioned above that prior to meeting Christ were considered profit were unceremoniously moved to the loss column on meeting the risen Christ. The Apostle gave the lie to all who believe there is anything about them, possessions, family, education, profession, prestige, (works of the flesh)... that could possibly commend them to God. Paul argued that if anyone qualified on personal merit it was he. This was not boasting, he was merely making an argument and very graphically explained that the only thing the 'flesh' can produce is dung (v. 8). The basis of his righteousness, therefore, is the faithfulness of Christ (3:9) and the goal of his life was Christ's likeness.

Consequently he considered all his merits as manure when compared to the *excellency* of Christ. It appears there were some Jews or converts to Judaism who were trying to press circumcision and maybe other Jewish rituals as a requirement for salvation on the Philippians. The idea being Jesus alone was not sufficient for salvation.

The Apostle went on to list the real profits of the transaction secured in Jesus and at the top of the list, he had a righteousness not of his own but which is of God by faith in Christ. Thus Paul exchanged all that was once valuable to him, literally his life for what was to be gained in Jesus. The Apostle heeded the words of Jesus: *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Matt.16:26).

Despite all, his salvation in Jesus had secured knowledge of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, power, fellowship. Paul was quick to point out that he had not yet obtained spiritual perfection. Spiritual perfection should be a goal in life but it will not be a reality; not as long as we are in our 'flesh'.

Consequently, he pursued the perfection that every believer must recognize he or she does not have.

Our Study Text is polemical as Paul used his own testimony to refute all arguments from whatever source that would question the sufficiency of Jesus alone to procure our salvation. It is helpful to bear in mind that Paul's emphasis on the gospel of grace meant accepting Christian Gentiles without their being required to fulfill any Jewish rituals (Gal. 5:2-6).

This approach caused consternation in some Jewish circles and created serious tensions and provoked furious opposition elsewhere (Acts 15:1-5; Gal. 2:1-16). Much of the opposition came from a group generally labelled 'Judaizers' and they mounted a campaign to destroy the credibility of Paul and his gospel. They sought to impose circumcision along with faith in Christ on Gentile Christians, as a means of obtaining salvation.

Paul exposed the arrogant presumption of both the Judaizers and himself in his pre-Christian mindset and immediately renounced any merit in his past life. At issue was the need to repudiate his previous attitude toward his background, knowing such a change was necessary in order to **know Christ and be found in him not having his own righteousness based on the Law (i.e., based ultimately on human merit and achievement), but one which comes through faith.**

It is most important as we study this Lesson to understand that Paul pursued what benefited him, and of course we should do the same. One writer emphasizes the importance of this, encourages us and says:

“If he (Paul) suffers loss, it’s only that he might gain something.

Let us be clear and unapologetic that as followers of Jesus Christ we are pursuing that which benefits us. We want to gain something. That which benefits us- that which we gain- is intimacy with our Lord.

We are going to hear the passionate cries emanating from our hearts and interpret them as Jesus calling to us from that place. And we will meet with him there- in the center of our hearts, in the Holy of Holies where Jesus dwells...

We will consider everything else loss and, yes, even garbage in comparison to knowing Christ. Nothing satisfies the heart like intimacy with Christ. For I am convinced that neither money nor possessions nor marriage nor sex nor health nor success nor recognition nor affirmation nor anything else might consider valuable is able to be compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ my Lord.”

Let us study our Text with an eye to self-examination, to ensure that we are relying totally on Jesus for our salvation, as those who *have no confidence in the flesh*.

There is an upward call to all believers. God is calling you to move on in life. Examine yourself to see if there is something holding you back in life from knowing Jesus fully.

So stand firm and strain forward, says one writer.

THETEXT

Verses 1 – 6. Paul’s tone to this point in the Epistle has been warm and affectionate, reflective of the mutual love between himself and the Philippians. We can see a note of caution in the last phrase of Verse 1 and in Verse 2 a definite change in tone, as the Apostle turned his attention to those that threatened the church.

Finally which normally means the end can also be used to mark a transition to a different subject as we see here, (See 2 Thes.3:1).

...rejoice... is a recurring theme in this letter and while our circumstances can at times seem joyless, the Christian can and should always rejoice in the person and work of Jesus

Christ. Paul was writing from prison but could still rejoice in his circumstances, because he is rejoicing *in the Lord*.

The Apostle gives a triple *beware* (stay clear of) followed by three epithets for Judaizers. He portrayed them as *dogs*, a contemptible and derogatory term for Gentiles; *evil workers* in that their righteousness by works teaching diametrically opposed the Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. *Mutilators*, refers to circumcision, which in the case of the Judaizers, Paul portrays as a purely physical cutting that ignores the changed heart required in the Law, (Lev.26:41; Deut.10:16; Rom.2:28-29).

He contrasts them with the Philippians and himself, 'true' Jews who *worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Jesus Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh*. For true Christians, it is all on Jesus, no credit to self on any grounds.

...*the circumcision*... Paul and the Philippians were the real covenant community in that their hearts were 'circumcised', they had experienced the new birth, confirmed by the fact they had the Holy Spirit, (Col 2:11-15). ...*worship by the Spirit of God*...the reality was that Jesus Christ had come and true worship was no longer by ritual or rite as the Judaizers were trying to impose on the Philippians and others. (See 2 Cor 1:21-22 and Eph 1:13-14). Christians should not rely on their own abilities to please God, or expect rigid adherence to laws or any works of the 'flesh' to gain favour with God. Rather, they depend on the finished work of Christ and *rejoice* only in Him (1Cor 1:30-31).

The term 'flesh' (sarx, human credentials) has a fairly broad semantic range in the New Testament. It can refer physically to the body, to the totality of human nature (John 1:14), and to our fallen human nature (Rom 7:5; 8:9). In Phil 3:3 the term refers to the best the religious man can produce apart from Christ.

The Apostle then presented a best case Judaizer scenario using his own pre-conversion outlook. It is unlikely that few if any of the Judaizers could match his impeccable and impressive Jewish credentials and diligence in 'works of the Law' (vs. 5 – 6). He recited his pedigree, circumcised the eighth day, (no Ishmaelite he), not a proselyte, of the tribe of Benjamin – a ranking tribe in Israel and a Pharisee by training, with blameless law-keeping in his own eyes and those of his contemporaries. If ever there was a 'true' Jew, Paul was a Jew indeed! He argued that if anyone could be confident in 'works' righteousness it would be he more than anyone else. He was not boasting (2 Cor.11:16-17) about his past, merely making an argument.

A note on the Pharisees: The Pharisees were one of several Jewish sects which developed in the inter-testamental period sometime around the middle of the second century BCE. It has been argued that their name means "separated ones," due largely to the fact that they had resisted the inroads of Hellenism or Greek thought, way of life, and philosophy in their synagogues and religion. At the time of Paul they were regarded as the strictest of the sects and devoted themselves to the oral tradition developed around the Law, in an attempt to prevent any violation of its standards. While the term Pharisee is often used in a derogatory fashion today, the Pharisees had more in common with Jesus theologically than any of the other contemporary religious sects and Paul is here using it

as a badge of honor. Nonetheless, their focus on externals to the complete neglect of love and mercy earned them a scathing rebuke from Jesus himself (Matt. 23).

Verse 7. Here Paul begins to repudiate the Judaizers and his own pre-conversion beliefs regarding salvation and in so doing clearly delineate what happens at conversion, a total and complete rejection of self and a full embrace of Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation. Jesus made the same point: *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Matt.16:24-26). (See Matt.13:44-46).

But... will set up a sharp contrast between Paul's pre-conversion thinking and the radical change that followed his dramatic encounter with the Risen Christ.

...what things... specifically referring to his credits or what would have been profits in verses 5 and 6, Paul now viewed as belonging to the loss column. In terms of gaining Christ, attaining salvation, his credentials from verses 5 and 6 were in fact a hindrance, an impediment and thus he calls them a *loss*. Note however that it is only from the viewpoint of gaining Christ or salvation that these things are bad, because Paul lauds these very qualities in Romans 9:4-5. In fact the apostles utilized his Pharisaical, exegetical training and exploited his background as Jew in his missionary efforts and his great zeal for God never left him.

The negative appraisal of his heritage and achievements in verses 5 and 6 then is directly tied to the view that those things could gain him favour with God, now that Jesus had come and accomplished His redemptive work at Calvary. One writer notes in part:

"...There is nothing wrong with being born a Jew. Indeed it was a blessing to be circumcised on the eighth day and reared in a devout Jewish home. It was a tremendous privilege to belong *by birth* to the nation of promise and descend from one of the most famous tribes within it. The fact of his zeal, although misdirected, is admirable in itself and so is the upright life he strove to live. He was moral, religious, and deeply committed to his people and their heritage. In many respects he was a model citizen. The problem is not with the things in themselves *per se*, but rather with Paul's approach to them and what he hoped they'd accomplish before God. He performed them with the arrogant (yet under the guise of humility) conviction that because of them God found him pleasing. In such a posture he was virtually an enemy of God and the gospel. They were gain to me (moi kerde), the apostle says, in that he thought they would achieve standing and merit with God. This was his fundamental (mis)understanding of the OT Law and his complete lack of appreciation for the Christian gospel".

Verse 8. *...all things...* beyond those things he had in mind in verse 7, here he includes everything about himself that might in anyway be seen as contributing to his salvation. The present tense of the word 'count' means not just things from his past but the assessment in

on an on-going basis. The tense implies ongoing consideration for this is something that he obviously does repeatedly.

Note, all Christians must have this attitude. All the good we might have accomplished, whatever virtue we might appear to possess must be attributed to the grace of God and in no way a factor in our salvation. We must guard against proclaiming Christ and His redemptive work on the Cross, while at the same time secretly depending on some other thing for comfort, help, and ultimate salvation.

Paul switches to the other side of the ledger to show how his great heritage, lineage and accomplishments and anything and everything in his present experience became a loss, a result which came because of a monumental shift in his values. He now had a different evaluation of what was an advantage to him. It is not that what he had before was of no value or that there was no merit in anything else. It is just that the value of knowing Christ is so much greater, that he can walk away from what he had before without blinking an eye. He abandoned all his advantages, and if these advantages were stripped away from him because of his allegiance to Christ it did not bother him for in reality they were “garbage” or “rubbish”.

His once lofty position did not seem lofty anymore and faded into total insignificance and worse in light of *the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus*. Paul exchanged all that he was for the sake of Christ. In other words Paul found the ‘*pearl of great price*’ (Matt.13).

...*knowledge of Christ Jesus*...(knowledge = gnosis Gk.). The word speaks of knowing God experientially, intimately, as opposed to having intellectual knowledge or hearing about. It was used to describe the experience of the Greco-Roman mystery religionists who sought a mystical, transcendent knowledge of the deity in intimacy through drunken, wanton ceremonies.

The word is also the translation of the Hebrew word which means ‘to know’ used in the Old Testament. One writer notes: **For example, it is used of God’s knowledge of his people in election and grace (in Am. 3:2, of the nation; in Ex. 33:12, 17 and Jer. 1:5; of an individual; 2Tim 2:9) and their knowledge of him in love and obedience (see Jer. 31:34; Ho. 6:3; 8:2). The Pauline expression “to know Christ” is intimate (my Lord), and glows with the warmth of a direct relationship; it may therefore be taken as equivalent to “fellowship with Christ” to which Paul was introduced on the day of his conversion (2Cor 4:6).**

The use of the word would convey the sense of personal, intimate knowledge to both Jews and Gentiles, though the Old Testament view of the true knowledge of God as expressed in personal relationship, love, and obedience seems more fitting.

*And Adam **knew** his wife again; and she bare a son,* (Gen.4:25)

*My sheep hear my voice, and I **know** them, and they follow me,* (John 10:27).

The word strongly implies a bond of love.

Christ Jesus my Lord... Paul saw Jesus in His fullness, the three names signifying prophet, priest and King. The term ‘my’ stresses the personal relationship aspect of the knowledge (knowing). Race, rank, tradition, ceremonies and sincerity will not establish the deep knowledge and intimate love bond with Jesus Christ. The apostle came to see that only through salvation by grace through faith can one have such a relationship with God.

...suffered the loss... In light of the *excellency of the knowledge of Christ* Paul voluntarily distanced himself from his past unconverted state with all its status and privileges and his new life in Christ manifested the change. His loss was also very real in another sense. It soon became common knowledge through his own proclamations and evangelism that he was a Christian. The Jewish authorities would have disavowed and stripped him of any position or authority he held in Judaism. So he lost all he had accumulated socially, maybe even materially, since many of those who were considered to have defected from Judaism were treated as non-persons by family and friends.

All this loss harmonized with Paul’s new outlook shaped by his ‘knowledge’ of Christ. He made no attempt, had no desire to hold on to status, office, or heritage but consciously came to regard those things as refuse, garbage, dung when compared to winning Christ. Paul fully came to realize that his previous attitude toward his background and accomplishments was a massive obstacle to his salvation and gladly labelled his past as dung!

Paul made the choice the ‘rich young ruler’ could not make, (Luke 18:23). It was more valuable for Paul to **‘lose his life and then gain it’, than to try—as so many people do today—to gain his life in this world, only to lose it in the next** (Matt 16:26).

...win Christ... **refers to partaking in His free offer of righteousness, entering into a deep and satisfying relationship with Him, and thus securing an eternal home with Him. In all ways, Paul had won Christ.**

Verse 9. *... be found in Him...* is a concept Paul often used in his letters and the idea is to be so intertwined in a bond of intimate love and knowledge with Christ, that one is said to be ‘in Him’. It expresses a similar idea as the last phrase in verse 8 and means personal appropriation, make Him my own. This is the idea expressed in Gal.2:20

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. The bottom line is, not I but Christ!

Paul spent his adult life trying to attain his own righteousness based on his observance of the law. This was the way of life for Pharisees. They believed salvation was by perfect adherence to the law of God. This was the righteousness of self- control, external morality, religious ritual and ceremony, the righteousness of good works, in effect it was self-righteousness. It was the righteousness produced by the flesh. Righteousness is having a right standing with God, that God accepts you. Of course Romans 3:19 - 20 reminds us, *By the deeds of the flesh or the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

After his life-long effort to establish his own righteousness by works, tradition, sincerity, ceremony and ritual, Paul gladly exchanged all that for the righteousness which comes from faith in Christ, the righteousness which is *of God by faith. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God,* (Eph.2:8). A right relationship with God is not by works, it's by faith.

The best men can do is as "*filthy rags*" (Isa.64:6). The best we can do is to come *short of the glory of God*.

How does this righteousness from God come about? We are accepted by God when we take by faith the righteousness He gives us because Christ paid the penalty for our sin. When we accept Christ' sacrifice on our behalf, God gives us Christ righteousness. Remember that the one who found Paul was God. So we know that God is looking for us. When God found Paul he literally found him "in Christ", for Paul was united with Christ and became a part of the messianic family. This gave Paul "a righteousness" which he did not have before, for he was now in a different place from the place he was in when God found him.

Note that "righteousness" does not mean either innate or imputed "goodness" but instead means covenant membership, for when one is righteous, one belongs to God. God bestows upon the person with faith in Christ the gift of righteousness or the gift of covenant membership.

One preacher provides the following definition of faith.

"Faith is the confident continuous confession of total dependence on and trust in Jesus Christ to provide the necessary requirements for entrance into God's eternal Kingdom."

This means that we must realize several things as one writer puts it.

"First, the status of covenant membership is conferred upon the people of God.

Second, we must disabuse our selves of the notion that it has anything to do with heritage and achievements.

Third, we must realize that such status is conferred on the basis of faith in Christ.

Fourth, we must realize that the righteousness from God is not an end but a means to an end.

It is not our goal to "get" righteousness or even to be righteous, however we might define these terms. Our goal, having been found by God in Christ, is to use the righteousness we already have as a platform to know Christ...

We try to be righteous or conform to some standard or achieve something that might earn us the right status. We have the wrong goal. We already possess the righteousness we need. The goal is intimacy with Christ. It's why you have come this far. The great privilege in being one of God's righteous ones is that we get to know Christ. Enjoy the privilege".

Verse 10 – 11. Here Paul begins to list the 'profits' to be had from the faith that comes from God. ... *may know Him...* same idea as 'knowledge of Christ (vs.8) and 'found in Him' (vs.9). The apostle abandoned his past that he may know Jesus and *the power of His resurrection*.

Jesus' great power was manifested in His resurrection. He showed His power over the physical world and the spiritual world. He displayed power over the human realm and the realm of death in the resurrection. This power enables the Christian to conquer temptation, give service to Christ, overcome trials, gives strength when we are weak, gives boldness for witnessing, *Now unto him that*

is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, (Eph.3:20).

...fellowship of His suffering... The Christian is always driven to Christ in times of suffering and in Him we find the caring, sympathetic and merciful High Priest. He is the friend who feels our pain and who in all points was tempted like as we are and who knows our weakness and our infirmities. Paul and all Christians can find fellowship with Christ, when we suffer for righteousness sake, even as He did.

At the same time when Paul speaks about experiencing the suffering of Christ he's pointing us to the fact that Christ loved the world so much that He suffered for it. We can say the sufferings of the world are the sufferings of Christ. The Apostle, who followed after Christ, accordingly loved the world so much that he was prepared to suffer for it.

So when we love Christ and the people of the world, we experience the sufferings of Christ because we too will suffer for the world, sharing and bearing the pain of others as we work to introduce them by word, deed, or prayer to the love of Christ. One writer cautions and pleads with us however:

“If we want to know Jesus, we must connect with the suffering of the world and resolve to bring the love of Christ to it. This is how we experience the sufferings of Christ. This is also how we know him at the deepest level. Knowing Christ is of such value that the suffering that brings us closer to him is not only to be tolerated but desired”.

...the resurrection from the dead... this is the hope of all Christians, the change that happens in the *twinkling of an eye* when the Lord returns at His second coming. At that time we receive our glorious bodies and are changed in to incorruptibility, (1Cor.15; 1Thes.4).

Paul tells us however that he wants to experience the power and suffering of Christ and wants to be “conformed to his death”. This is another serious desire for we recall that because of His obedience to the Father and for His love of the world, Christ suffered and died for the world. When Paul said he wanted to be conformed to Jesus’ death then, it meant he was willing to suffer for others because he loved them and because he also was obedient to the Father. His life would begin to take the “form” or “shape” of the life of Christ. In so doing he would get to know Him.

Clearly then the Apostle encourages us to connect with Christ and then connect with the world and share the love of Christ. The Holy Spirit will strengthen and motivate us in this endeavour. It is often pointed out that when the believer comes into contact with suffering over and over again, the believer will find that they will shy away from it less and less, and will enter into suffering more with their heart breaking for this broken world and all those in pain. The miserable ones of the earth must be met and the more one works with them the closer one will be to the heart of Christ.

One writer in view of this makes this interesting observation:

“Is this serving or knowing Christ? It's both. We tend to separate “doing” and “being”. Christ can be known in both the being and the doing. In fact, intimacy with Christ is incomplete if either contemplation or action is jettisoned. Both are necessary. Contemplation and action are mutually reinforcing. One motivates the other, and vice versa. Thinking about

Christ causes us to take action. Taking action causes us to think about Christ. The contemplative life and the active life join forces in knowing Christ.”

Let us consider it carefully what we are saying for if you want to know someone you want to know the story of that person's life. In the case of Jesus we know that the dominant themes of His life was suffering and resurrection. So when we connect with Christ we are not only connecting with the story of His life we want to go even deeper and we want to experience them given that we believe the story of Christ. So the Apostle tells us that Christ has invited us to make His story our story and in doing that we will get to “know” Him..

Verse 12 – 14. In these next verses Paul uses what for him was a familiar metaphor, that of an athlete running a race. He sees the athlete as the Christian and the race as the Christian life. The apostle is painting a picture of maximum effort, as the Christian advances towards the finish line. The theme of these verses then, is pursuing the prize. The analogy is that of a runner who is running to win in order that he might gain the prize. The focus is the matter of pursuing the spiritual prize and Paul is talking about Christian effort toward growth.

All the ‘profits’ derived from faith in Christ, the knowledge of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the power of Christ, the fellowship of Christ and the glory of Christ might have led some to think that Paul had already reached spiritual perfection. True that ‘positionally’ we are perfect in Christ, however we are still in our ‘flesh’ and the sin nature lingers. Also, Judaizers plaguing the Philippian church might have been teaching that circumcision plus Jesus gives perfection or the heretics could be claiming that through a certain level of knowledge they had attained perfection

One writer reminds us:

The apostle issues a total disclaimer of any spiritual perfection. He would have them know that he is not perfect. He has not reached moral perfection, he has not reached spiritual perfection even though he is a new creation, even though he has a new heart and a new disposition which desires strongly holy things, even though he had union with Jesus Christ and a new mind, the mind of Christ, even though he has new standing before God and is accepted by God and entitled to heaven and has the righteousness of Christ covering him, even though he has the indwelling Holy Spirit who is the power of God, even though he has promised future glory and indwelling glory in that Spirit, he has not arrived...he is not perfect. He is still temptable. He is still the possessor of his unredeemed flesh. He is still a sinner.

2 Peter 3:18 speaks to this issue: *Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* There is a growing process called sanctification. When we are saved we receive the knowledge of Christ, the righteousness of Christ positionally, the power of Christ in our life, the fellowship of Christ in communion with Him, but not in perfection. There must be growth and this is the pursuit to which the apostle is committed. He is talking about Christian effort toward growth.

... *already attained*... means to receive, to grasp, to seize, to acquire, to attain, to obtain. The apostle is saying I am not there, I have not become perfect yet!

...*I follow* (dioko=Gk.) *after*...means I press on, I run, I pursue, I chase. It is used of a sprinter and the word means aggressive, energetic endeavor. The picture is of a straining of every spiritual muscle; this is running to win,(1Cor.9; 1Tim.6:12; 2 Tim.4:7; Heb.12:1-2).

... *apprehend*... Paul is saying that he is expending maximum effort to meet the goal Jesus has for his life. He is pursuing the very thing for which Christ called him. The reason Christ redeemed Paul became the goal of his own life. Awareness of the need to pursue a better spiritual condition is where all spiritual progress starts and this must be followed by maximum effort.

Paul repeats the thought of verse 12 in verse 13 prefaced by the endearing term *brethren*. Another strong disclaimer; whatever impression they might have gotten from his previous statements or from what others claimed, he was not yet there yet; he had not achieved perfection.

...*forgetting those things*... Paul dropped everything from his past; good things, bad things, achievements, virtuous deeds, great accomplishments, as well as bad things, failures, disasters. He was content with Christ and he just wanted to move forward. Christians should not live on past victories nor be debilitated by past sins and burdens of guilt. They have been made free to forget the past prominence they once had, the beauty that they once had and that age has stripped away from them, the physical power they once had. The past does not own the Christian or determine what they will do, think, or how they will react. Since they are in the process of change and are held in the righteousness of Christ they can afford to be honest about the present, knowing that they have the freedom as well to shed the past.

...*reaching forth*... means to stretch a muscle to its limit, extreme effort is in view here. This is a runner stretching every muscle to reach the finish line.

The Apostle says he *press towards the mark for the prize*. The mark is to be like Christ and the prize is to be made like Christ. When the *high calling* of God comes we will be like Christ. We are not going to reach that goal in this life but it's still the goal of our life.

The believer's attitude therefore should be to long for, strain forward, stand firm, press on for the things that God has made available to them. God is calling believers toward their homeland, heavenward, and they should press on to apprehend what God has destined for them.

Those that are positionally perfect, that is they have been made perfect in Christ, though not practically yet, they should have the attitude of pursuing the prize. Some day our position will match our practice when we are glorified at the second coming of Jesus.

This of course has great practical value for Christians who are often discouraged because they continue to sin.

The believer does not know everything or have every ability, but if there is an area of your life that needs work God will certainly reveal the truths of Scripture which will directly impinge on what is happening in your life. One writer notes:

Christians are perfectly free to examine themselves and honestly conclude that there are things about them that are reprehensible, that it is wrong for them to act the way they do, and yet not be thrown off by that realization because they know that God is committed to completing them. They can unhypocritically judge their wrong behaviour and conclude with non-Christians, that they have been wrong.

Christians should not rationalize their behaviour. The world has lots of advice on how to rationalize sin. The world says you are a terrific person despite the fact that you are, for instance, extremely selfish. That really isn't selfishness, we are told, that assertiveness, that is strength of character. We are told that sexual promiscuity is really a healthy physical expression; it is something to your advantage because it demonstrates that you understand how life in the fast lane is lived. But a Christian can look honestly at himself and say, "I have failed and I know it. This is not the best that the grace of God can do. What you see in not what you will someday get. I'm going to be different one day, therefore I can be honest about the present".

Paul could therefore quite logically call for continuity and conformity to the path that has brought us to faith in Christ. The idea is to keep 'moving along' the path of spiritual progress. The term means to follow in line, to line up. It was used of armies marching in battle order in step.

Here are some matters that will lead to spiritual progress: The word of God is paramount. (*As newborn babes desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow*). Constantly in the Word will keep us consistent and pursuing the prize.

Prayer is another cog in maintaining spiritual progress and was a habit to Paul. *We night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face and complete what is lacking in your faith,* (1Thes.3:10).

CONCLUSION

We are saved by grace through faith ([Eph 2:8-9](#)). True faith that genuinely taps into the grace of God will always express itself in works that have their source in Christ, as well as their nature and goal in Christ and His law ([Gal 6:1-2](#)). The best way to express saving faith and experience the transformation of the Spirit of Grace is by obeying Christ's commands. No one can receive salvation and standing with God by relying on their own abilities to do law-works. This belief system is common in most religions but is completely contrary to the saving purposes of Christ's death on the cross.

Paul presents 'knowing' Christ as more valuable *than* anything else in his heritage and more precious to him than anything else in his present experience. It was more valuable because it was saving, personal, and transforming. It is the personal knowing of Christ that was so exciting to Paul and ought to be to the Philippians and to us today as well.

The 'rich young ruler' flunked the test when he was asked the question, 'what will you give in exchange for your soul? Jesus offers us union with Him, righteousness, power, fellowship, glory. What are we going to hold on to that's equal? What good is it going to do if we gain the whole world and lose our soul?

There are some compelling reasons for continued spiritual growth First of all, it glorifies God and that is what a Christian is supposed to do with his life, bring glory to God. It verifies regeneration. It marks the fact that we are truly changed because we are in the process of making it visible that your life is being changed. Thirdly, it adorns the truth. It lets us literally wear the truth of God, so others can see it. Fourthly, it grants us assurance. When there is spiritual progress in our life there is the

Renounce Everything for Christ

sense that we belong to God because we can see His work and our 'calling' and election become sure.

Among the practical suggestions is the call to remember that you're in a process and that you are not perfect. We are also told not to let the lack of information about things intimidate us for we do not know everything. God however knows everything and will guide us appropriately. We're also told later on in the chapter that we should follow the example of people that are worthy of being followed. Also, we are to place no confidence in the flesh.

And most importantly we must be totally dependent on Jesus. In doing so we will renounce everything for Christ. We are not to have a plan B, a fallback position. We are to reject everything else but Christ and to put our self in the position, stretching our self out on Christ so much that if He does not come through for us, we are lost. We are to retain none of the things that we had previously depended on to save us or to build us up. We must put ourselves in a position where we have nowhere else to go. So we must stay in Christ.

But of course He will come through. He will never forsake us. He is faithful. So we can rejoice in Him.

Let us fully embrace Jesus alone for our salvation and daily strive to be like Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God.