

# Philippians 3:12-13 Commentary

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**Philippians 3:12** Not that I have [already obtained \(1SAAI\)](#) it [or have already become perfect \(1SRPI\)](#) but I [press on \(1SPAI\)](#) so that I [may lay hold \(1SAAS\)](#) of that for [which also I was laid hold of \(1SAPI\)](#) by Christ Jesus ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [Ouch hoti ede elabon \(1SAAI\)](#) e ede [teteleiomai. \(1SRPI\)](#) [dioko \(1SPAI\)](#) [de ei kai katalabo. \(1SAAS\)](#) [eph' o kai katelempthen \(1SAPI\)](#) [hupo Christou \[Iesou\].](#)

**Amplified:** Not that I have now attained [this ideal], or have already been made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of (grasp) and make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me and made me His own. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Lightfoot:** Do not mistake me, I hold the language of hope, not of assurance. I have not yet reached the goal; I am not yet made perfect. But I press forward in the race, eager to grasp the prize, forasmuch as Christ also has grasped me.

**NLT:** I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Yet, my brothers, I do not consider myself to have "arrived", spiritually, nor do I consider myself already perfect. But I keep going on, grasping ever more firmly that purpose for which Christ grasped me. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Not that I already made acquisition or that I have now already been brought to that place of absolute spiritual maturity beyond which there is no progress, but I am pursuing onward if I may lay hold of that for which I have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

**Young's Literal:** Not that I did already obtain, or have been already perfected; but I pursue, if also I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by the Christ Jesus;

## NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY OBTAINED IT: Ouch hoti ede elabon (1SAAI)

- Php 3:13-[note](#); Php 3:16-note; Psalms 119:5,173, 174, 175, 176; Ro 7:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24- notes; Gal 5:17- note; 1Ti 6:12; James 3:2
- [Philippians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### Related Resources:

- Athletic Metaphor
- Commentary on Running/Boxing - 1Co 9:24-note, 1Cor 9:25-note, 1Cor 9:26-note, 1Cor 9:27-note

### Index to "The Metaphors of St Paul" by John Saul Howson (1868)

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Several times in the New Testament the Christian life is pictured as a race

1 Corinthians 9:24-27-[note](#) Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

2 Timothy 4:7-[note](#) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

Hebrews 12:1-[note](#) Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

**Not that** (ouch hoti) is a phrase that warns against misconception. The Greek word for **"hot"** signifies absolute negation. Paul wants to make certain that he is not misunderstood.

Paul's willingness to acknowledge that he had not yet "arrived" at the zenith spiritually, indicates he is still in need of progress and prepares one for his statements that follow. As **Wiersbe** explains it...

A divine dissatisfaction is essential for spiritual progress. (Be Joyful)

It should be noted that commentators have interpreted what the **"it"** is that Paul had not already obtained in various ways...

Some suggest that it is all that is included in verses 8–11 (**Ed**: Seems to be the most common interpretation), while others believe that Paul is referring to his resurrection from the dead in verse 11; still others interpret the object as the prize referred to in verse 14 (cf. 1 Cor 9.24–25-[note](#)). ([The United Bible Societies' New Testament Handbook Series](#))

**Jamieson** feels that Paul is denying he had obtained "a perfect knowledge of Christ, and of the power of His death, and fellowship of His sufferings, and a conformity to His death. ([Philippians 3 Commentary](#))

**Robert P. Lightner** agrees writing "he wanted them to know that he had not yet attained the goals stated in verse 10. He was still actively pressing on toward them. He had by no means reached the final stage of his sanctification. ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#))

**Matthew Poole** explains that "by an elegant anticipation and correction, lest any should conclude from what he had written, as if he were now arrived at the height he aimed at in the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and a full and perfect stature in that body, or almost at the very pitch, he doth here make a modest confession of his **not attainment**, (whatever false apostles might pretend to), 2 Co 10:12, 12:6, 7; but of his earnest desire and utmost endeavor to be raised to the complete holiness he was designed to, "in heavenly places in Christ" "Jesus," Eph 2:6. (Matthew Poole's Commentary on the New Testament)

**Kenneth Wuest** explains that **obtained** (lambano) "in this verse is from a different Greek word than that in the preceding verse

("that I may **attain [katantao]**" ). In the latter instance, we found that it meant "to arrive at, as at a goal." Here the Greek verb (lambano) speaks of an **active appropriation**. That which Paul says he has **not yet appropriated** in an absolute sense, he mentions in Philippians 3:10. He has come to experience in some degree at least, the power of God surging through his being. He has entered into a joint-participation with Christ in suffering for righteousness' sake. The stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19, 20, 21, 22) is an example of that. He has been brought to the place in his experience where he radiates to some degree the self-lessness, the self-abnegation of the Lord Jesus. **But he has not appropriated these, laid hold upon these, in the fullest measure. There is room for much improvement and advance in these respects.**" ([Philippians Commentary Online- Recommended](#)) (Bolding and references added)

**EBC** adds that "Having stated that his conversion brought about a new assessment of his goals and gave him the overwhelming desire to know Christ ever more fully, Paul then explains how his present life is a pursuit in this new direction. **But he does not want to be misunderstood**. He is not claiming that his conversion has already brought him to his final goal. He has not already received all he longs for nor has he been brought to that perfect completeness to which he has aspired. Perhaps there were perfectionists in Philippi who had resisted the Judaizers with their emphasis on works and ceremonies by going to the extreme of claiming to have acquired already the consummation of spiritual blessings. Paul understands clearly that he has a continuing responsibility to pursue the purposes Christ had chosen him for. Spiritual progress is ever the imperative Christians must follow. ([Gaebelein, F. Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan Publishing](#)) (Bolding added)

#### OR HAVE ALREADY BECOME PERFECT: e ede teteleiomai (1SRPI):

- Job 17:9; Ps 138:8; Pr 4:18; 1 Cor 13:10; 2 Cor 7:1; 13:9; Eph 4:12- note; Heb 12:23 - note; Heb 13:21 - note; 1 Pet 5:10 - note; 2 Pet 1:5, 6, 7, 8- note; 2 Peter 3:18 - note
- [Philippians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Ray Pritchard** - If this text does nothing else, it should put an end to all dreams of sinless perfection in this life. Paul begins with an honest admission—"I'm not there yet." Unlike so many contemporary leaders, he has no problem admitting his own personal shortcomings. He's isn't perfect yet and he knows it—and this becomes the place where his spiritual growth begins.

**Become perfect (5048)** (**teleioo [word study]** related to **teleios** from **telos** = an end, a purpose, an aim, a goal, consummate soundness, idea of being whole) means to accomplish or bring to an end or to the intended goal (**telos**). It means to be or become complete, mature, fully developed, fully grown, brought to the end (goal), finished, wanting nothing necessary for completeness or that which assures it will be in good working order. It does not mean simply to terminate something but to carry it out to the full finish which is picked up in the translation "perfected".

**Teleioo** signifies the attainment of consummate soundness and includes the idea of being made whole. Interestingly the Gnostics used **teleios** of one fully initiated into their mysteries and that may have been why Paul used teleios in this epistle.

In **Hebrews 12:2** (see note) Jesus is designated as "the Author and Perfecter of faith" where perfecter is **teleiotes**, the Completer, the One Who reached the goal so as to win the prize so to speak.

**Wuest** elaborates on the NT word group (telos, teleioo, teleios, teleiosis, teleiotes) **Teleios** the adjective, and **teleioo** the verb. The adjective is used in the papyri, of heirs being of age, of women who have attained maturity, of full-grown cocks, of acacia trees in good condition, of a complete lampstand, of something in good working order or condition. To summarize; the meaning of the adjective includes the ideas of full-growth, maturity, workability, soundness, and completeness. The verb refers to the act of bringing the person or thing to any one of the aforementioned conditions. When applied to a Christian, the word refers to one that is spiritually mature, complete, well-rounded in his Christian character. ([Philippians Commentary Online- Recommended](#))

**Richards** commenting on the word group (telos, teleioo, teleios, teleiosis, teleiotes) writes that "These words emphasize wholeness and completeness. In the biological sense they mean "mature," or "full grown": the person, animal, or plant achieved the potential inherent in its nature. The perfect is the thing or person that is complete, in which nothing that belongs to its essence has been left out. It is perfect because every potential it possesses has been realized. ([Richards, L O: Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Regency](#))

It is interesting and doubtless no mere coincidence that in the Septuagint (LXX) **teleioo** is translated numerous times as consecrated or consecration, especially speaking of consecration of the priests (cf Jesus our "great High Priest") (Ex 29:9, 29, 33, 35 Lv 4:5; 8:33; 16:32; 21:10; Nu 3:3). The LXX translators gave the verb **teleioo** a special sense of consecration to priestly service and this official concept stands behind the writer's use in this passage in Hebrews 5:9 (note). It signifies that Jesus has been fully equipped to come before God in priestly action.

In sum the fundamental idea of **telioo** is the bringing of a person or thing to the goal fixed by God.

In the present verse Paul uses **telioo** not to signify sinless or flawless but to picture his goal (and his desire for all saints - Col 1:28, 29-see notes Col 1:28; 29) of **spiritually maturity**.

The implication is that Paul would one day "become perfect". That day for all of us will be when we receive our glorified bodies. Paul states that he has not come to the place in his Christian life where his growth in **spiritual maturity** has been completed (i.e., he is not yet glorified) and beyond which there is no room for further improvement.

**Marvin Vincent** comments that in the two verbs (have obtained... become perfect) "There is a change of tenses which may be intentional; the **aorist** "attained" (obtained) pointing to the definite period of his conversion, the **perfect tense**, "am made perfect" referring to his present state, Neither when I became Christ's did I attain, nor, up to this time, have I been perfected. (Vincent, M. R. Word Studies in the New Testament. Vol. 3, Page 1-449)

**Perfection**, in a Christian sense, means becoming mature enough to give ourselves to others. —Kathleen Norris, Amazing Grace,

**Spurgeon** introduces his sermon **Onward!** writing...

SO far as his acceptance with God is concerned a Christian is complete in Christ as soon as he believes. Those who have trusted themselves in the hands of the Lord Jesus are saved: and they may enjoy holy confidence upon the matter, for they have a divine warrant for so doing. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." (see note Romans 8:1) To this salvation the apostle had attained.

But while the work of Christ for us is **perfect**, and it were presumption to think of adding to it, the work of the Holy Spirit in us is not perfect, it is continually carried on from day to day, and will need to be continued throughout the whole of our lives. (**Ed**: cp progressive sanctification). We are being "conformed to the image of Christ," (Ro 8:29-note) and that process is in operation, as we advance towards glory.

The condition in which a believer should always be found is that of progress: his motto must be,

### "Onward and upward!"

Nearly every figure by which Christians are described in the Bible implies this. We are plants of the Lord's field, but we are sown that we may grow - "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." (Mark 4:28)

We are born into the family of God; but there are babes, little children, young men, and fathers in Christ Jesus; yea, and there are a few who are perfect or fully developed men in Christ Jesus. It is a growth evermore.

**Is the Christian described as a pilgrim?** He is no pilgrim who sits down as if rooted to the place. "They go from strength to strength." (Ps 84:7)

The Christian is compared to a **warrior**, a **wrestler**, a **competitor in the games**: these figures are the very opposite of a condition in which nothing more is to be done. They imply energy, the gathering up of strength, and the concentration of forces, in order to the overthrowing of adversaries.

The Christian is also likened to a **runner in a race**, and that is the figure now before us in the text. It is clear that a man cannot be a runner who merely holds his ground, contented with his position: he only runs aright who each moment nears the mark.

### Progress is the healthy condition of every Christian man

Progress is the healthy condition of every Christian man; and he only realizes his best estate while he is growing in grace, "adding to his faith virtue," "following on to know the Lord," and daily receiving grace upon grace out of the fullness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus.

Now, to this progress the apostle **exhorts us** - nay, he does more than exhort, **he allures us**. He stands among us; he does not lecture us ex cathedra, standing like a learned master far above his disciples, but he puts himself on our level, and though not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles, he says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended."

He does not give us the details of his own imperfections and deficiencies, but in one word he confesses them in the gross, and then declares that he burned with eager desire for perfection, so that it was the one passion

of his soul to press onward towards the great goal of his hopes, the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus.

We cannot desire to have a better instructor than a man who sympathises with us because he humbly considers himself to be of the same rank as ourselves.

Teaching us to run, the apostle himself runs; wishing to fire our holy ambition, he bears testimony to that same ambition flaming within his own spirit. I desire so to speak from this text that every believer may want for progress in the divine life...

... My observation of personal character has been somewhat wide, and I cannot help bearing my testimony that I am greatly afraid of men who make loud professions of superior sanctity. I have had the misfortune to have known, on one or two occasions, superfine brethren, who were, in their own ideas, far above the rest of us, and almost free from human frailties. I confess to have felt very much humbled by their eminent goodness until I found them out: they talked of complete sanctification, of a faith which never staggered, of an old nature entirely dead, until I wondered at them; but I wondered more when I found that all the while they were rotten at the core, were negligent of common duties while boasting of the loftiest spirituality, and were even immoral while they condemned others for comparative trifles. I have now become very suspicious of all who cry up their own wares. I had rather have a humble, timid, fearful, watchful, self-deprecating Christian to be my companion, than any of the religious exquisites who crave our admiration. These great-winged eagles who fly so loftily will, I fear, turn out to be unclean birds. The excessive verdure of a superfinely flourishing religiousness often covers a horrible bog of hypocrisy.

### **The Christian soldier has to fight with sins every day**

Let me add, once more, that whatever shape self-satisfaction may assume - and it bears a great many - it is at bottom nothing but a shirking of the hardship of Christian soldierhood. The Christian soldier has to fight with sins every day, and if he be a man of God, and God's Spirit is in him, he will find he wants all the strength he has, and a great deal more, to maintain his ground and make progress in the divine life.

Now, self-contentment is a shirking of the battle, I do not care how it is come by. Some people shirk watchfulness, repentance, and holy care, by believing that the only sanctification they need is already theirs by imputation. They use the work of the Lord Jesus for them as though it could thrust away the necessity of the Spirit's work in them. Personal holiness they will not hear of: it is legal. If they come across such a text as "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" (see note Hebrews 12:14) or, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," they straightway force another meaning upon it, or else forget it altogether.

Another class believe that they have perfection in the flesh, while a third attain to the same complacent condition by the notion that they have overcome all their sins by believing that they have done so; as if believing your battles to be won was the same thing as winning them. This, which they call faith, I take the liberty to call a lazy, self-conceited presumption, and though they persuade themselves that their sins are dead, it is certain that their carnal security is vigorous enough, and highly probable that the rest of their sins are only keeping out of the way to let their pride have room to develop itself to ruinous proportions.

You can reach self-complacency by a great many roads. I have known enthusiasts reach it by sheer intoxication of excitement, while Antinomians come at it by imagining that the law is abolished, and that what is sin in others is not sin in saints. There are theories which afford an evil peace to the mind by throwing all blame of sin upon fate, and others which lower the standard of God's demands so as to make them reachable by fallen humanity. Some dream that a mere dead faith in Jesus will save them, let them live as they list; and others that they are already as good as need be.

Many have fallen into the same condition by another error, for they have said, "Well, we cannot conquer all sin, and therefore we need not aim at it. Some of our sins are constitutional, and will never be got rid of." Under these evil impressions they sit down and say, "It is well, O soul, thou art in an excellent condition; sit still and take thine ease, there is little more to be done, there is no need to attempt more." All this is evil to the last degree.

### **The Lord calls us to this high calling of contending with sin within and without until we die**

I have used few theological terms, because it does not matter how we get to be self-satisfied, whether by an orthodox or a heterodox mode of reasoning; it is a mischievous thing in any case. The fact is, my brother, the Lord calls us to this high calling of contending with sin within and without until we die; and it is of no use our mincing the matter, we must fight if we would reign; our sins will have to be contended till our dying day, and probably we shall have to fight upon our death-bed.

Therefore, every day we are bound to be upon our watch-tower against sin around and with us. It is of no use our deluding ourselves with pretty theories, which act only as spiritual opium to cause unhealthy dreams. Sin is a real thing with each one of us, and must be daily wrestled with; there is an evil heart of unbelief within us, and the devil without us, and we must watch, and pray, and cry mightily, and strive, and struggle, and own that we have not yet apprehended. If we dream that we are at the goal already, we shall stop short of the prize. The full soul loathes the honeycomb; a man full of self, cares for nothing more. Shake off these slothful bands, my brethren; quit you like men - be strong. You are as weak as others, and as likely to sin; watch, therefore, and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

What is it, at bottom, that makes men contented with themselves? It may be, first of all, a forgetfulness of the awful holiness of the law of God. If the law of the ten commandments is to be read only as its letter runs, I could imagine a man's judging himself and saying, "I have apprehended; "but when we know that the law is spiritual, how can we be self-complacent? My dear brother, if thou thinkest thou hast reached its perfect height, I ask thee to hear these words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." Canst thou say, in the sight of a heart-searching God, "I have fulfilled all that"? If you can, I am staggered at you, and think you the victim of a strong delusion, which leads you to believe a lie.

### **The least sin is a desperate evil**

Brethren who can take delight in themselves must have lost sight of the heinousness of sin. The least sin is a desperate evil, an assault upon the throne of God, an insult to the majesty of heaven. The simple act of plucking the forbidden fruit cost us Paradise. There is a bottomless pit of sin in every transgression, a hell in every iniquity. If we keep clear of sins of action, and if our tongue be so bridled that we avoid every hasty and unadvised speech, yet do we not know that our thoughts and imaginations, our looks and longings of heart, have in them an infinity of evil? If, after having learned that sin can only be washed out by the death of the Son of God, and that even the flames of hell cannot make atonement for a single sin, a man can then say, "I am content with myself," it is to be feared that he has made a fatal mistake as to his own character.

Is there not a failure, in such cases, to understand the highest standard of Christian living? If we measure ourselves among ourselves, there are many believers here who might be pretty well satisfied. You are as generous as other Christians are, considering your income. You are as prayerful as most other professors, and as earnest in doing good as any of your neighbors; if you are worldly, yet not more worldly than most professors, nowadays, and so you judge yourself not to be far below the standard. But what a standard! Let us seek a better. Brethren, it is a very healthy thing for us who are ministers to read a biography like that of M'Cheyne. Read that through, if you are a minister, and it will burst many of your wind-bags. You will find yourselves collapse most terribly. Take the life of Brainerd amongst the Indians, or of Baxter in our own land. Think of the holiness of George Herbert, the devoutness of Fletcher, or the zeal of Whitfield. Where do you find yourself after reading their lives? Might you not peep about to find a hiding-place for your insignificance?

### **In the presence of giants we become dwarfs**

When we mix with dwarfs we think ourselves giants, but in the presence of giants we become dwarfs. When we think of the saints departed, and remember their patience in suffering, their diligence in labor, their ardor, their self-denial, their humility, their tears, their prayers, their midnight cries, their intercession for the souls of others, their pouring out their hearts before God for the glory of Christ, why, we shrink into less than nothing, and find no word of boasting on our tongue. If we survey the life of the only perfect One, our dear Lord and Master, the sight of his beauty covers our whole countenance with a blush. He is the lily, and we are the thorns. He is the sun, and we are as the night. He is all good, and we are all ill. In his presence we bow in the dust, we confess our sin, and count ourselves unworthy to unloose his shoelatchets.

It is to be feared that there is springing up in some parts of the Christian church a deceitful form of self-

righteousness, which leads even good people to think too highly of themselves. It is a fashionable form of fanaticism, very pleasing to the flesh, very fascinating, and very deadly. Many, I fear, are not really living so near to God as they think they are, neither are they as holy as they dream. It is very easy to frequent Bible readings, and conferences, and excited public meetings, and to fill one's self with the gas of self-esteem. A little pious talk with a sort of Christians who always walk on high stilts will soon tempt you to use the stilts yourself; but indeed, dear brother, you are a poor, unworthy worm and a nobody, and if you get one inch above the ground, you get just that inch too high. Remember, you may think yourself to be very strong in a certain direction, because you do not happen to be tried on that point. Many of us are exceedingly good tempered when nobody provokes us. Some are wonderfully patient, because they have a sound constitution, and have no racking pains to endure; and others are exceedingly generous, because they have more money than they want.

A ship's seaworthiness is never quite certain till she has been out at sea. The grand thing will be to be sound before the living God in the day of trial. I pray every believer here to get off the high horse, and to remember that he is, "naked and poor and miserable" apart from Christ, and only in Jesus Christ is he anything, and that if he thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself, but does not deceive God. ([Philippians 3:13,14 Onward!](#))

Paul Billheimer in **Overcomers Through The Cross**, reminds us that just as God takes many years to produce an oak tree, He also takes a life time to mature a saint. Christian growth is a process that takes time. Billheimer reminds us that

An unripe apple is not fit to eat, but we should not therefore condemn it. It is not yet ready for eating because God is not done making it. It is a phase of its career and good in its place.

### **There are no shortcuts To spiritual maturity**

**John Walvoord** explains that...

One of the by-products of Judaizing legalism was the thought of the possibility of attaining perfection through human works. This, however, Paul definitely disclaims. Even though he is perfectly satisfied in Christ, he recognizes there is much yet to attain in Christian experience. This he states in verses twelve through fourteen: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 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."

In this statement the apostle definitely puts behind him the idea that perfection is something that can be reached before we see our Lord at the rapture of the church. Perfection in an absolute sense is not for this life. The Scripture teaches that it is possible for the Christian to be filled with the Spirit and to have victory over sin. Christians should grow in grace and increase in maturity and experience holiness. All of these are proper goals. In spite of all God's wonderful provision, however, no one reaches the stage of sinless perfection.

No possibility is recognized in the Scripture of eradicating sin or of reaching the point in spiritual maturity where it is impossible to sin any more. There are always more goals to be reached. The word perfect in verse twelve (Gr. teleleiomai) does not mean perfection in the absolute sense. It is rather the word for reaching an ultimate goal. This Paul declares to be the "prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," as stated in verse fourteen. This future goal is when Paul leaves earth and flesh behind and enters into the presence of the Lord, either through death or translation. His present task is not perfection, but is rather to lay hold on the purposes of God for his life, to wit, to fulfill his apostleship and God's purpose for him to grow in grace. ([Philippians 3 We Look for the Savior](#))

**C H Spurgeon** writes that Paul says...

"I count," as if he had taken stock, made a careful estimate, and had come to a conclusion. The conclusion was dissatisfaction; nor was this to be regretted: it was a sign of true grace. And yet he was vastly superior to any of us. Shame then on us poor dwarfs if we are so vain as to account ourselves as having apprehended. Yet there are those who prate of having reached a higher life than this. But self-complacency is the mother of spiritual declension. We have observed —

1. That the best of men do not talk of their attainments. Their tone is self-depreciation, not self-content. Everybody could see their beauty of character but themselves. Shallow streams brawl and bubble, but deep

waters flow on in silence.

2. That we, in our holiest moments, do not feel self-complacent. Job spoke up for his innocence till the Lord revealed Himself. We shall never see the beauty of Christ without perceiving our own deformity.

3. That whatever shape self-satisfaction may assume it is a shirking of the hardships of Christian soldier hood. Some shirk watchfulness and repentance by believing that the only sanctification they need is already theirs by imputation. Personal holiness, they say, is legal. Others believe they have perfection in the flesh, and others yet attain complacency by the notion that they have overcome all their sins by believing they have done so, as if believing a battle won could win it.

4. That complacency can be reached by many roads.

(1) Enthusiasts reach it by sheer intoxication of excitement.

(2) Antinomians by imagining that the law is abolished, and that sin is not sin in the saints.

(3) Cowards, who say we cannot conquer all sin, and, therefore, we need not aim at it.

5. That complacency has its root in forgetfulness of the awful holiness of God's law, and the heinousness of sin.

**M. R. DeHaan** says "Self-satisfaction is the death of progress. Dissatisfaction with past accomplishments is the mother of invention. Because man was dissatisfied with carrying and lifting loads upon his shoulders, he invented vehicles to ride in. Pity the man who is content with his own progress and feels he has [arrived]. This is all the more true in the Christian life. Nothing here is as deadly as self-satisfaction. The most boring people I ever meet are the ones who take up my lime telling me what they have done, when they ought to be doing more."

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**ILLUSTRATION** - For years I never felt I measured up to all I thought the Lord wanted me to be, or all I thought I should be. Satan convinced me that since I wasn't "perfect," I had no right to minister to others. Then one day, my children brought me a bouquet of flowers they had picked. I hugged each child with joy. As I tried to arrange the flowers in a vase, I discovered my children had picked no stems, just blossoms. I laughed—I had been blessed with their gift of love, however imperfect. It was then I realized we don't have to be perfect to be a blessing. We are asked only to be real, trusting in Christ's perfection to cover our imperfection. —Gigi Graham Tchividjian, "Heart to Heart,"

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**Dave Roper** has a devotional that relates to David's "comfortable" situation in these opening verses...**Pressing On**

If I do not experience something far worse than I yet have done, I shall say the trouble is all in getting started. —Mrs. George (Tamsen E.) Donner, member of the ill-fated Donner party, 1971 in a letter dated June 16, 1846

Every age has its perils, but the greatest peril may be in thinking that the trouble "is all in getting started." Sometimes the greatest hazards lie ahead.

Noah, Moses, Gideon, Samuel, David, Solomon, Uzziah, and a host of biblical people fell into failure near the end of their days. As the apostle Paul reminds us, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1Co 10:12+)

**"The long, dull, monotonous years of middle-aged prosperity or middle-aged adversity are excellent campaigning weather for the devil,"** C. S. Lewis wrote. ([The Screwtape Letters](#))

**And the devil's finest stratagem is sloth, "that great, sprawling, slug-a-bed sin,"** as Dorothy Sayers termed it.

**Sloth is a spiritual indifference or apathy that has many causes** but may grow out of the belief that we've arrived and have no more ground to gain. Or, that we have little left to give.

**"Apathy causes one to fall into a deep sleep,"** the Wise Man said, and then added, "that soul will go hungry."200

**Ah, there it is: a spiritual torpor that starves our souls. Slow down, we say to ourselves; you've given much. Isn't it time to refrain from further sacrifice? Spare yourself. Why go on reading, studying, pursuing God. Stop this strenuous following after.**

No! I say. That is not true. We can never stop growing toward God. Holiness is a dynamic thing, a matter of motion. There is no static balance in the spiritual life. We're either moving toward God or away from Him.

St. Gregory put it simply: "When the soul does not direct its efforts to higher things . . . it stoops to concern itself with low



desires.”201 When we fail to direct our passions toward heavenly things, we fall into ungodly desires. Bitter animosities demean us; irritability, petulance, impatience, and loss of temper degrade our souls.

**So we must never let up, for our adversary does not. He is working every moment to plague and blight our final years. We must pursue God and His righteousness with hearty energy to the end of our days.** This was Paul’s driving compulsion: “To know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” (Php 3:10+) It must be ours as well.

To know Jesus, to experience more of his life-giving power, to patiently bear our portion of His humiliation and suffering, to become like Him in self-sacrificing love—this is the work that must keep us busy to the end of our days.

We’ll not “achieve” the righteousness we seek in this life—that awaits heaven—but you and I must “press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of [us].” (Php 3:12+)

So, we must pursue the Lord and His righteousness (Mt 6:33+) with all our heart, soul, and mind (Mk 12:29-30+)—with a fierce, unyielding resolve for as many days as He may give us (Ps 90:12). We must spend time in His presence and choose to do His will. Thus He will fill us with His Spirit and deliver us from the perils that lie ahead.

But he who would be born again indeed,  
Must wake his soul unnumbered times a day,  
And urge himself to life with holy greed. . .  
Submiss and ready to the making will,  
Athirst and empty, for God’s breath to fill.  
—George MacDonald

197 Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered wagon women : diaries & letters from the western trails, 1840-1890* (University of Nebraska Press, 1995). This letter was written when the party was 200 miles from Fort Laramie, on the way to California.

198 1 Corinthians 10:12

199 C. S. Lewis, [The Screwtape Letters](#)

200 Proverbs 19:15 (my translation). The Hebrew noun ‘atzlah, usually translated “laziness” suggests apathy and inertia.

201 St. Gregory, *Pastoral Care* (Paulist Press), 134.

202 Philippians 3:10

203 Philippians 3:12, emphasis added. Paul’s verb, which is translated here “press on,” means “to run after, to chase after, to pursue with intensity”—the same word he used to describe his relentless, uncompromising pursuit of the church: “I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison” (Acts 22:4+, emphasis added).

204 George MacDonald, [The Diary of an Old soul](#) May 21. MacDonald is not suggesting that we must work to be saved, but that our salvation may become indeed new life and deliverance from sin (ED: See/memorize Php 2:12+ but be sure and read/memorize Php 2:13NLT+!).

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**Room For Advancement** - After Calvin Coolidge, the 30th president of the United States, issued his famous "I do not choose to run" statement, he was besieged by reporters wanting details. One persistent journalist kept asking, "Exactly why don't you want to be president again?" "Because," Coolidge replied, "there's no chance for advancement!"

Although spoken with humor, his answer hints at the letdown that often follows high attainment. When a goal is reached, the anticipation associated with it is gone.

Even though we experience letdowns in the Christian life, we never come to the place where there's no room for growth. The apostle Paul described himself as spiritually mature (Phil. 3:15), yet he also declared that he wasn't perfect (v.12). He was aiming for the goal of being like Christ in all of life's varied experiences, whether he was enjoying prosperity or enduring adversity. He knew that attaining the goal of Christ-likeness takes a lifetime.

Oh, to have that same restless contentment! Our soul's deepest longings are satisfied when we know Jesus as our Savior, but we must keep pressing on to know Him better and to become more like Him! That's the mark of a growing Christian. There's always room for advancement. --D J De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**Room for improvement  
is the largest room in the world.**

## BUT I PRESS ON: dioko (1SPA1) de:

- Phil 3:14; Ps 42:1; 63:1, 2, 3,8; 84:2; 94:15; Isa 51:1; Hos 6:3; 1Thes 5:15; 1Ti 5:10; 6:11; Heb 12:14; 1Pet 3:11, 12, 13
- [Philippians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

It's difficult to go forward when you keep looking back. What is true physically, is even more true spiritually!

**But** - This marks a change of direction in the passage (see value of observing **terms of contrast**).

**Press on** (1377) (**dioko** from **dio** = pursue, prosecute, persecute or pursue in good sense) means to follow or press hard after, pursue with earnestness and diligence in order to obtain or go after with the desire of obtaining.

**Dioko** - 45x in 44v - **NAS** = persecute(10), persecuted(13), persecuting(7), persecutor(1), practicing(1), press(2), pursue(7), pursuing(2), run after(1), seek after(1).

Matt 5:10ff, 44; 10:23; 23:34; Luke 11:49; 17:23; 21:12; John 5:16; 15:20; Acts 7:52; 9:4f; 22:4, 7f; 26:11, 14f;  
Rom 9:30f; 12:13f; 14:19; 1 Cor 4:12; 14:1; 15:9; 2 Cor 4:9; Gal 1:13, 23; 4:29; 5:11; 6:12; Phil 3:6, 12, 14; 1  
Thess 5:15; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:12; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:11; Rev 12:13.

**Dioko** means to move quickly and energetically toward some objective and thus literally pictures vigorous activity. Paul's figurative use emphasizes the necessity for each of us (**active voice** = our choice, we are not puppets) to vigorously, uncompromisingly, continually as the habit of our life (**dioko** = **present tense**) work out our salvation in fear and trembling. Paul (who we are to imitate) continually exerts effort to forge ahead. He has in mind the image of a Greek runner streaking down the race course. He is keeping up the chase. He is pressing on toward a fixed goal. Paul pursued sanctification with all his might, straining every spiritual muscle to win the prize.

Paul's previous misdirected zeal and drive were now harnessed by the Holy Spirit to achieve the purpose for which God had taken hold of him.

In the spiritual life, direction makes all the difference. True believers aren't in heaven yet, but they continually aim their steps in that direction.

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Columnist Herb Caen wrote in the San Francisco Chronicle: "Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle; when the sun comes up, you'd better be running." Don't just run to live, run to win.

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**Keep Pressing On** - Many years ago, a promising Greek artist named Timanthes was under the instruction of a well-known tutor. After several years, the young painter created an exquisite portrait. He was so thrilled with what he had painted that he sat day after day gazing at his work.

One morning, however, he was horrified to discover that his teacher had deliberately ruined his painting. Angry and in tears, Timanthes ran to him and asked why he had destroyed his cherished possession. The wise man replied, "I did it for your own good. That painting was retarding your progress. It was an excellent piece of art, but it was not perfect. Start again and see if you can do even better." The student took his advice and produced a masterpiece called "Sacrifice of Iphigenia," regarded by some as one of the finest paintings of antiquity.

God never wants us to be content with our accomplishments. He wants us to reach even higher plateaus of service and Christ-likeness. Paul recognized this, for even though he was a godly man and accomplished much, he admitted that he still needed to advance in holiness (Phil. 3:12, 13, 14).

Child of God, don't be satisfied with your spiritual attainments. With His help, keep pressing on! --H G Bosch ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

When you've reached a plateau,  
And your strength's almost gone,  
But the Lord still says, "Go,"  
That's the time to press on. --Hess

**If you think you've arrived,**

think again.

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**Keep Pressing On** - Do you ever feel overwhelmed by the challenges of living for Christ? You're not alone. Even Paul felt that way. In 2 Corinthians 1:8, he honestly admitted that the troubles he and Timothy endured in Asia had taxed them beyond measure, and they feared for their lives. But Paul said they learned this lesson: "We should not trust in ourselves but in God" (v.9).

In Philippians 3:12, 13, 14, Paul again wrote honestly about his Christian walk, admitting that he hadn't attained perfection: "I press toward the goal for the prize." He identified this lifelong pilgrimage as "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Years ago, a group of Englishmen tried to conquer Mt. Everest. They pressed on against cold, wind, blizzards, and avalanches. When they came within 2,000 feet of the peak, they set up camp. Two men, Mallory and Irvine, eagerly pressed on, expecting to return in about 16 hours. They never came back. The official record said simply: "When last seen, they were heading toward the summit."

Whatever the obstacles, let's keep pressing on in the upward call of God, trusting in Him and not ourselves. At life's end, may it be said of us, "When last seen, they were heading toward the summit!" — Joanie Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

When the pathway seems long,  
When temptation is strong,  
When your strength's almost gone—  
That's the time to press on. —Hess

**When the pressure is on, press on!**

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Hurry up!" "You're too slow!" "We're late!" How often do impatient words like these crop up in our speech, revealing our fast pace of life? If we're not careful, we become people living in the fast lane, demanding quick arrivals and instant results. Stress experts call this problem "hurry sickness."

In Philippians 3, the apostle Paul's testimony of lifelong growth reminds us that Christian maturity can be encouraged but not hurried. In his book *Overcomers Through The Cross*, Paul Billheimer says that just as God takes time to make an oak tree, He takes time to make a saint. Christian growth is a process.

Billheimer writes, "An unripe apple is not fit to eat, but we should not therefore condemn it. It is not yet ready for eating because God is not done making it. It is a phase of its career and good in its place."

Are you feeling impatient over your spiritual growth? Remember, God is not finished with you—nor does He expect to be until He calls you home. Only make sure that your goal is to know Christ and to become more like Him. Then slowly but surely, under blue skies and stormy, He will bring you to maturity. It's His sure cure for "hurry sickness." — Joanie Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O God, make me one of those rarest souls  
Who willingly wait for Thy time;  
My impatient will must be lost in Thine own,  
And Thy will forever be mine. —Bowser

**There are no shortcuts to spiritual maturity.**

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**IN ORDER THAT I MAY LAY HOLD OF THAT FOR WHICH ALSO I WAS LAID HOLD OF BY CHRIST JESUS: de ei kai katalabo, (1SAAS) eph' o kai katelempthen (1SAPI) hupo Christou [Iesou]:**

- Phil 3:14- note; 1Ti 6:12, Ps 110:2,3; Acts 9:3-6,15; Eph 1:4 -note; 2Th 2:13
- [Philippians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

Literally this section reads "if also I may lay hold (**katalambano**) of that for which also I was laid hold (katalambano) of by the Christ Jesus

**In order that** - This phrase introduces a purpose. When you see similar phrases always take a moment and ask what purpose? why

this purpose?, etc. See value of observing and querying **terms of purpose or result** .

**Laid hold of** (2638) (**katalambano [word study]** from **katá** = down + **lambáno** = take) means to take eagerly; to seize, to possess or to attain. It can picture seizing one with a hostile intent. Here Paul uses it figuratively to describe taking a firm grasp to the point that it is it has been made one's possession. Paul wants to catch hold of it and pull it down, like a football player who not only wants to catch his man, but wants to bring him down and make him his own (and receive credit for the tackle!). Paul wants to appropriate and make his own that for which Christ caught Paul and made him His own. What was that? To be perfect as His heavenly Father is perfect. To be fully mature. It was Christlikeness that Paul was pursuing after. It is absolute Christlikeness that he says that he has not yet captured and pulled down so as to make his own.

Paul is going back to the Damascus Road, where, when he met Jesus Christ, he said, "Lord, what shall I do?" (cp Acts 22:10, 9:15, Eph 2:10-note) A message came to Paul through Ananias in a short time as to what the Lord wanted him to do. The Lord **set Paul apart** (saint = a set apart one) to be a minister to the Gentiles, to bear witness to His Name before Gentiles and before kings. It became Paul's goal from that moment on to obedient to His Lord's commands. May his tribe increase!

**Marvin Vincent** comments that "Paul's meaning is, "I would grasp that for which Christ grasped me. Paul's conversion was literally of the nature of a seizure. That for which Christ laid hold of him was indeed his mission to the Gentiles, but it was also his personal salvation, and it is of this that the context treats. (Vincent, M. R. Word Studies in the New Testament. Vol. 3, Page 1-450)

**C H Spurgeon** gives an illustration of how we should go about laying hold of that for which we were laid hold of by Christ Jesus:

A neighbour near my study persists in practising upon the flute. He bores my ears as with an augur, and renders it almost an impossibility to think. Up and down the scale he remorselessly runs, until even the calamity of temporary deafness would almost be welcome to me. Yet he teaches me that I must practise if I would be perfect; must exercise myself unto godliness if I would be skilful; must, in fact, make myself familiar with the Word of God, with holy living, and saintly dying. Such practice, moreover, will be as charming as my neighbour's flute is intolerable.

**Olford** writes that as Paul looks "back to that moment when Christ took hold of him on that Damascus road, he recalls the purpose of it all, namely, conformity to Christ. Ro 8:28, 29 (notes) states it this way: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Any doctrine of holiness which does not fulfill this purpose is un-Christian and unbiblical. (Olford, S. F. Vol. 2: Institutes of Biblical preaching)

## **APPREHENDED TO APPREHEND**

**F B Meyer...**

**Phil. 3:12**

WE may compare these words with those which the Apostle uttered in the presence of Agrippa: "Wherefore, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." That vision included his appointment to be a minister and a witness of all the things which he had seen, and of those in which fresh revelations were to be made, the promise of deliverance from the people and the Gentiles, and the provision of the marvellous results that would accrue from his testimony to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16, 27, 18).

With these words to help us we can better understand the purport of this striking phrase.

**PAUL REALISED THAT HIS CONVERSION**

**HAD BEEN HIS APPREHENSION BY GOD.**

**Paul Apprehended of Christ Jesus.**--To hear some men speak you would suppose that the initiative in their religious life had come from themselves, that the first approaches towards God emanated from their own hearts, that they were independent of Him until they voluntarily put themselves within the range of His care and help. Nothing could be further from the truth. As well might the flower speak of discovering the sunshine and turning its face thitherwards. The initiative of the religious life does not come from man but from God. The first steps in reconciliation are not on our side but on His. If we seek God it is only because He has been seeking us from early childhood, and has contrived the span of our life and the location of our home with special reference to our feeling after Him and finding Him (Acts 17:26, 27).

**God's Love Realised in Conversion.** When a man turns to God, the first thing he realises is that throughout the wild wanderings of his youth, and amid all the fret and war of his manhood, even when he has been most stubborn and rebellious, God's love has

never ceased to seek him. The true comparison for the soul is not that it is immured in dark galleries and catacombs, out of which it presently seeks to escape, but that God comes into the intricacies of its rebellion and wandering, calling tenderly and earnestly, awakening it from its stupefaction, shedding on fast-closed eyes beams of light to startle the drowsy sleeper, and eliciting by every method in his power a quick response. We love because we were first loved; we seek because we were sought; we leave our far country, not only because hunger impels, but because frequent missives from our Father's house tell us that He cannot be at rest until we are again seated at His table.

**As it was by Paul.** Paul realised that from his earliest hour, God had been about his path and his ways. When he was circumcised the eighth day, when he was brought up as a son of the law, when he was engaged in persecuting the Church, when he was working out for himself a righteousness in which to stand the searching inspection of the great White Throne, in and through all the Spirit of God had been near, teaching, admonishing, and stimulating his quest for the Pearl of great price. Finally, he recognised that on the day, ever memorable, of his journey to Damascus, the love of God in the Person of Christ had apprehended or seized upon him.

**After all, is not this conversion?** We grasp the hand of Christ because He has grasped ours, we are apprehended to live after the highest and noblest ideals because His hand has been laid upon us in arrest.

**When Christ Apprehends us iris for a Great Purpose** "That I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus." When God brings us to Himself, it is to realise some lofty ideal on which He has set His heart. In some cases, the eye beholds, as Moses did in vision, the tabernacle which it is to build, it stands in clearly defined outlines, with every knop and tassel, every curtain and fringe, every pillar and hook perfectly designed. In other cases, the pattern is only revealed step by step and day by day. Each morning the Spirit of God presents to us in the circumstances of our life, and in the impulse of our heart, some new item in the great conception, and calls on us to fulfil it,--thus the temple groweth into a dwelling place for the Eternal.

Whichever method God may adopt with you, whether in the early morning of life you stand upon the mountain and see the completed plan, or your eyes are holden so that you are permitted to see it only by piecemeal, yet be sure that there was a great thought in His heart when He drew you out of the horrible pit and from the miry clay, and set your feet upon a rock, and established your goings.

**We must not Refuse to Apprehend that for which Christ Apprehended us.** In all life there ought to be the human response to the Divine call. We do not become saints against our will or in violation to our free agency. We must be workers together with God, working out what He works in. We must first see something of the goal to which our steps are to be directed, and then we must mount up with wings as eagles, run without being weary, walk without being faint. It is possible for each of us to turn our backs upon the heavenly vision, shut our ears to the Divine call, and take the downward course. The poet Dante caps his description of the rich young man who went away sorrowful, by calling it The Great Refusal. Herod and Pilate, Felix and Agrippa, all refused to apprehend that for which they were apprehended, and their course has been followed by myriads.

**The Case of John Smart Mill.** There is a modern instance in the biography of John Stuart Mill, aptly quoted by Dr. W. M. Taylor in this connection. These are his words: "I was in a dull state of nerves, such as everybody is occasionally liable to, unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement--one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times becomes insipid or indifferent--the state, I should think, in which converts to Methodism usually are, when smitten by their first conviction of sin. In this frame of mind it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself: "Suppose that all your objects in life were realised; that all the changes that you are looking forward to could be completely effected at this very instant, would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" and an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, No. At this my heart sank within me; the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down, all my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end, the end that ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for." But, when earthly projects fell down, did not the Lord draw near, laying on him His arresting hand, and beseeching him to adopt a more stable foundation for his life? And is it not clear that he too made a great and deliberate refusal to feel after God if haply he might find Him, who is not far from any one of us?

**We must not be Content with a Partial Attainment** "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." And again, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended." As Paul looked at the result of his work, the large cities which had become permeated with Christian truth, the flourishing Churches which looked to him as their founder, the Epistles which he had written, and the commanding influence of his spoken words, surely he might have counted himself to have apprehended. He did not do so because as he drew nearer to the attainment of God's ideal, some new phase opened, as when we are climbing the hills, and having reached the vantage-ground on which our eyes have been set during hours of arduous toil, we see another height rising beyond. The more the glory shone on the face of Moses, the quicker he was to veil it from view; the higher the soul rises into likeness with Christ, the deeper its humility. When we see what Christ is in the glory of His Person, and in the greatness of His love, we feel that our own attainments are as molehills to Alps.

A friend discovered Thorwaldsen in tears, and on asking why the distinguished sculptor was giving way to depression, he received this reply, "Look at that statue. I have realised my ideal, and therefore fear that I have reached the high-water mark of my profession. When a man is satisfied, he ceases to grow." It is also said that Tennyson was seventeen years in writing "In Memoriam." He wrote the little song "Come into the Garden, Maud" fifty times before he gave it to the public. The wife of a distinguished painter said, "I never saw my husband satisfied with one of his productions." Thus self-dissatisfaction lies at the root of our noblest achievements. There is no condition of growth in the Divine life so necessary as a deep sense of dissatisfaction for the past. Let us admit that we have not attained to that identification with the Death of Christ, with His Resurrection, or with the gift of Pentecost, to that deliverance from the power of sin, and that conformity to His perfect image to which we have been called with a heavenly calling. Even if we are kept from known and outward sin, how much shortcoming there is in our hearts. If we have ceased doing the things that we ought not to do, alas for us, there are so many things that we fail to do. Paul not Discouraged though he had not Fully Apprehended. He knew Him whom he had believed, and therefore he said, "I press on toward the goal." Depression, which makes us slacken our steps, is from below, humility, which makes us more eager to attain God's purpose, is from above. Never yield to discouragement, never sit down face to face with failure or imperfection as though these were a necessary part of your life. God can forgive failure, but He cannot forgive those who abandon their high quest, and allow their hands to hang down and their knees to fail. Grasp the banner again, young soldier, and rush forward into the fight. Let past failure be an incentive to more commanding achievements. Remember that Christ is always just in front; His grace is sufficient; dare to claim the fulfilment of His own promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee." It seems as though these words of Paul are characteristic of his eager spirit through all the ages. Not only did he press on through obloquy and reproach, through imprisonment and threatened death; but from the excellent glory into which he has passed, we seem to hear those same clarion notes, "I press on." Pressing on in the knowledge of God, pressing on in high and noble service, pressing on only a few steps behind the Lamb as He goes ever conquering and to conquer, pressing on until the pulling down of all rule and authority and power has been accomplished, and God has become all in all. (F. B. Meyer. The Epistle to the Philippians - A Devotional Commentary)

**Philippians 3:13** [Brethren, I do not regard \(1SPMI\) myself as laid laid hold of \(RAN\) it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting \(PMPMSN\) what lies behind and reaching forward \(PMPMSN\) to what lies ahead \(NASB: Lockman\)](#)

**Greek:** [adelphoi, ego emauton ou logizomai \(1SPMI\) kateilephenai: \(RAN\) en de. ta men opiso epilanthanomenos \(PMPMSN\) tois de emprosthen epekteinomenos. \(PMPMSN\)](#)

**Amplified:** I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured and made it my own [yet]; but one thing I do [it is my one aspiration]: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** Brothers, I do not count myself to have obtained; but this one thing I do—forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching out for the things which are in front ([Westminster Press](#))

**Lightfoot:** My brothers, let other men vaunt their security. Such is not my language. I do not consider that I have the prize already in my grasp. This, and this only, is my rule. Forgetting the landmarks already passed as straining every nerve and muscle in the onward race,

**NLT:** No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** My brothers, I do not consider myself to have fully grasped it even now. But I do concentrate on this: I leave the past behind and with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Brethren, as for myself, as I look back upon my life and calmly draw a conclusion, I am not counting myself yet as one who has in an absolute and complete way laid hold [of that for which I have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus]; but one thing: I, in fact, am forgetting completely the things that are behind, and am stretching forward to the things that are in front; bearing down upon the goal,

**Young's Literal:** brethren, I do not reckon myself to have laid hold; and one thing -- the things behind indeed forgetting, and to the things before stretching forth

**BRETHREN I DO NOT REGARD MYSELF AS HAVING LAID HOLD OF IT YET: adelphoi, ego emauton ou logizomai (1SPMI) kateilephenai (RAN):**

- Php 3:8-note; Php 3:12-[note](#); Php 1:18, 19, 20, 21-note; Php 4:11, 12, 13-notes
- Click John MacArthur's exposition [Reaching for the Prize](#)
- [Philippians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Brethren** (80) (**adelphos** from **a** = denoting unity + **delphus** = womb) means literally those derived from the same womb, in this case all the children of God, those who have been born from above. This seems to be added at this juncture to arrest the reader's attention and draw them into the "moment".

**Expositor's Greek NT** - This direct appeal to them shows that he is approaching a matter which is of serious concern both to him and to them. (Ego emauton - "I... myself") Why such strong personal emphasis? Is it not a clear hint that there were people at Philippi who prided themselves on having grasped the prize of the Christian calling already?... he must assume the lowly position of one who is still a learner. (Ed: A good principle for all saints at all stages of spiritual maturity!). ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

**Regard** (3049) (**logizomai** from **lógos** = reason, word, account) means to reckon, compute, calculate, to take into account, to deliberate, and to weigh. **Logizomai** refers to a process of careful study or reasoning which results in the arriving at a conclusion. **Logizomai** conveys the idea of calculating or estimating.

Paul uses it often to look back on the process of a discussion and calmly draw a conclusion. This is Paul's deliberately formed opinion.

**Logizomai** was a term frequently used in the business community of Paul's day and meant to impute (put to one's account) or credit to one's account.

**Logizomai** is related to our English term **logic** (which deals with the methods of valid thinking, reveals how to draw proper conclusions from premises and is a prerequisite of all thought).

**Logizomai** has the force of looking back upon the process of a discussion and calmly drawing a conclusion. Paul had after much deliberation and consideration arrived at the conclusions which he stated in verse twelve. Paul's conclusion does not represent a spur of the moment decision but the result of serious thought, especially "calculation" of eternal values, which parenthetically will always serve to keep the Christian "runner's" perspective rightly oriented.

**Laid hold of** (2638) (**katalambano** from **katá** = intensifies the meaning or preposition prefixed in its local force meaning "down." + **lambáno** = take) means to take eagerly; to seize, to possess or to attain. It can picture seizing one with a hostile intent. Here Paul uses it figuratively to describe taking a firm grasp to the point that it is it has been made one's possession.

Paul's declaration seems to imply that some of the Philippian saints felt that they "had arrived". They may have held to the erroneous teaching of **sinless perfection**. Paul is saying that he isn't perfect yet and he knows it, an admission which should put an end to all speculation that believers can ever attain sinless perfection in this life. Paul doesn't hesitate to admit "I'm not there yet." So, beloved, if you think you've arrived spiritually you haven't!

Paul's use of **perfect tense** speaks of a past completed process with present results, and was his strong way of stating the fact that should settle the question. He himself had not completely grasped that for which the Lord Jesus had grasped him.

**Muller** - Just as a little child is a perfect human being, but still is far from perfect in all his development as man, so the true child of God is also perfect in all parts (Ed: positionally "made complete in Him", in Christ - Col 2:10-note), although not yet perfect in all the stages of his development in faith.

**BUT ONE THING I DO : en (heis = one) de:**

- Click John MacArthur's exposition [Reaching for the Prize](#)
- [Philippians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## SINGLE MINDED FOCUS ONE THING I DO!

**I do** - Added by translators. Literally without a verb the phrase is even more emphatic! -**But one thing!** Compare Jesus' words to Martha in Luke 10:42-note, context - Lk 10:38-41-note - the picture of Mary "listening" is vivid for Luke uses the **imperfect tense**. The picture is "over and over" she was listening. Jesus would say a word and like a "baby bird" she would "gobble" it up and be

ready for His next word. Also the phrase "seated at His feet" presents a precious picture - the verb is **parakathizo** from **para** = beside + **kathizo** = sit down, settle, meaning to sit beside [para] and the entire phrase [*pros tous podas ton Kurion*] pictures Mary right in front of the feet of Jesus. A good place for all of us to abide [compare Paul's "one thing"].

**Vine** writes that "the words "but one thing" are almost exclamatory, and what follows is a summing up of the one great object in thought and act.

**But (1161) (de) is a term of contrast. What is Paul contrasting?**

Paul had not arrived, but that did not deter him, for here we see his contrasting attitude. Note first that **'I do'** is not in the original Greek text but has been added by the translators. The literal Greek reads "**but one thing**," which dramatically sums up Paul's Christian conduct and purpose (cf Lk 9:62, Ps 27:4).

**Paul was a man of single purpose. <  
Paul had one aim and one ambition.**

This single minded focus of Paul is like the Olympic runner who has but one goal in mind after the gun goes off. To excel in any area of life, a person must say, "This one thing..." , not "These 20 things." Single-minded focus will win a great reward ( 1Cor 9:26-note)

A fierce fighting for focus and concentration is implicit in Paul's declaration "**One thing**".

So many believers tend to feel they can try to walk the way of discipline while making daily excursions into "Egypt" to pick up a few "leeks" (cp Nu 11:5, remembering Jer 17:9 and 1Co 10:6, 11!). But the narrow way leading to fullness of life heads in one direction; i.e., the path Jesus trod. It is the course that we must take - **one thing**.

Before the tragedy of the Chicago fire in 1871, D. L. Moody was involved in Sunday School promotion, YMCA work, evangelistic meetings, and many other activities; but after the fire, he determined to devote himself exclusively to evangelism. "**One thing I do**" became a reality to him. As a result, millions of people subsequently heard the Gospel (A reasonable illustration of the truth of Ro 8:28-note).

**Illustration** - A child stood gazing at a freshly opened box of chocolate candies—lips pressed together, concentrating fully upon the decision at hand. The rule was "Only one, no more than one, but any one you want." Should it be the biggest one, or would the small round one be the favorite peppermint cream? Then again, the long one might last longer. Which to choose? And how to decide? Perhaps a child's decisions seem trivial to us as adults. Oh, we recognize that they are important to the child, but we have a broader perspective. That is the question in making choices, isn't it? To have an eternal perspective on life and its decisions is to know how to choose. (Illustrations for Biblical Preaching. 1982, 1985, 1989 by Michael P. Green Grand Rapids: Baker Book House)

**Alexander Maclaren** writing of the **one thing I do** says "What a noble thing any life becomes that has driven through it the strength of a uniting single purpose, like a strong shaft of iron bolting together the two tottering walls, of some old building!" (

**Spurgeon** gives an illustration of a man intent on "this one thing"...

That was a grand action of old Jerome when he laid all his pressing engagements aside to achieve a purpose to which he felt a call from heaven. He had a large congregation — as large a one as any of us need want; but he said to his people, "Now, it is of necessity that the New Testament should be translated; you must find another preacher. The translation must be made; I am bound for the wilderness, and shall not return till my task is finished." Away he went with his manuscripts, and prayed and labored, and produced a work — the Latin Vulgate — which will last as long as the world stands; on the whole, a most wonderful translation of Holy Scripture.

**John Eadie** writes regarding "**this one thing**" that "The picture is that of a racer in his agony of struggle and hope. You see him! — every muscle strained and every vein starting — the quick and short heaving of his chest — the big drops gathered on his brow — his body bending forward, as if with frantic gesture he already clutched the goal — his eye, now glancing aside with a momentary sparkle at objects so rapidly disappearing behind him, and then fixing itself on the garland in eager anticipation. The apostle is not leaving, he is forgetting the things behind; he is not merely looking, he is reaching forth unto the things before; not only does he run, he presses toward the mark; nor was he occupied, weakened, or delayed by a variety of pursuits — "This one thing I do." ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

**Ray Pritchard** gives the following illustration of a man with this **one thing** mindset writing "One hundred years ago a young man from a wealthy family entered Yale University ([See more detailed discussion below](#)). His family intended that after completing his degree he would enter a suitable career in America. But God gripped his heart with the needs of China and he volunteered to go to that country with the gospel, much to the dismay of his family and friends. He left America but never made it to China, succumbing to



a disease before reaching that distant shore. After his death, a note was found in his effects that summarized his life:

**No reserve**

**No retreat**

**No regrets**

**Pastor Pritchard** then adds "I wonder how many of us could say the same thing?" [Go for the Gold](#)

**Dr. Torrey M. Johnson**, one of the founders of Youth for Christ said "Son, find that one thing you do that God blesses, And stick with it!"

**Vance Havner** said "I shall never forget Dr. R. A. Torrey saying to me as a young preacher, "Young man, make up your mind on one thing and stick to it." **ILLUSTRATION** The Christian life should be like a sword with one point, not like a broom ending in many straws. Such a single purpose forgets the past, reaches toward the future, and presses on. There is no time or place for side issues, diversions to the right or to the left. There is no place for hands on the plow with eyes looking back. Paul was a one-track man, but you can go a long way on one track!"

This single minded focus is necessary if one is to be a great athlete. Totally focused people succeed in life. **Click** for more in depth discussion of the metaphor of the "**Christian Athlete**".

**David** prayed to Jehovah "**Unite** my heart to **fear** Thy Name (Ps 86:11)

- See article entitled [Give Me An Undivided Heart](#)

**F B Meyer** - A divided heart lacks the first element of strength--it is unstable. The men who leave their mark on the world are those who can say: "This one thing I do." But we need more than concentration, we need consecration. We must not only be united in ourselves, we must be united in God. Let us make the prayer of Psalm 86:11, our own: "O knit my heart unto Thee, that I may fear Thy name." Yield yourself to God that He may disunite you from the world, and weave you into His own life.

**Spurgeon** ([Ref](#)) commenting on David's prayer for God to unite his heart writes "Having taught me one way, give me one heart to walk therein, for too often I feel a heart and a heart, two natures contending, two principles struggling for sovereignty. Our minds are apt to be divided between a variety of objects, like trickling streamlets which waste their force in a hundred runnels (rivulets or small streams); our great desire should be to have all our life floods poured into one channel and to have that channel directed towards the Lord Alone. A man of divided heart is weak, the man of one object is the man. God who created the bands of our nature can draw them together, tighten, strengthen, and fasten them, and so braced and inwardly knit by his uniting grace, we shall be powerful for good, but not otherwise. To fear God is both the beginning, the growth, and the maturity of wisdom, therefore should we be undividedly given up to it, heart, and soul."

**James** warned against double-mindedness writing...

the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-note; Jas 1:7, 8-note).

Paul's one focus was pursuing **the prize** in the next verse. **John MacArthur's** grandfather used to tell him "Just do one thing right in your life and you'll be way ahead of most people."

When your life has one driving compulsion and that is to be like Christ, you're moving in the right direction.

**David Guzik** writes that...

Paul was focused on one thing, and would not let those things which are behind distract him from it. The one thing was the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

We often let those things which are behind distract us, whether they be "good" things or "bad" things, we may let them keep us from what God has in front of us. Satan wants us to live either in the past or in the future; God wants us to press on in the present, because the present is where eternity touches us now. Paul knows that a race is won only in the present, not in the past or in the future. ([Notes](#))

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**Spurgeon** observes that when Paul says "**This one thing I do**," it sounds "as if he had given up all else, and addicted himself to one sole object - to aim to be like Jesus Christ. There were many other things Paul might have attempted, but he says, "**this one thing I do**." Probably Paul was a poor speaker: why did not he try to make himself a rhetorician? No; he came not with excellency of

speech. But you tell me Paul was busy with his tentmaking I know he was; what with tent-making, preaching, and visiting, and watching night and day, he had more than enough to do, but all these were a part of his pursuit of the **one thing**, he was laboring perfectly to serve his Master, and to render himself up as a whole burnt-offering unto God.

### **Cultivate a passion for grace and an intense longing after holiness**

I invite every soul that has been saved by the precious blood of Christ, to gather up all its strength for this **one thing**, to cultivate a passion for grace, and an intense longing after holiness. Ah, if we could but serve God as God should be served, and be such manner of people as we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness, we should see a new era in the church. The greatest want of the church at this day is holiness.

**Why did Paul pursue holiness with such concentrated purpose?** Because he felt God had called him to it. He aimed at the prize of his high calling. God had elected Paul to be a champion against sin. Selected to be Jehovah's champion, he felt that he must play the man. Moreover, it was "God in Christ Jesus" who the choice, and as the apostle looked up and saw the mild face of the Redeemer, and marked the thorn-crown of the King of Sorrows, he felt he must overcome sin, he could not let a single evil live within him; and, though he had not yet apprehended, yet he felt he must press forward till he had apprehended that to which God in Christ had called him.

Moreover, the apostle saw his crown, the crown of life that fadeth not away, hanging bright before his eyes. What, said he, shall tempt me from that path of which yon crown is the end? Let the golden apples be thrown in my way; I cannot even look at them, nor stay to spurn them with my feet. Let the sirens sing on either side, and seek to charm me with their evil beauty, to leave the holy road; but I must not, and I will not. Heaven! Heaven! Heaven! is not this enough to make a man dash forward in the road thither? The end is glorious, what if the running be laborious? When there is such a prize to be had, who will grudge a struggle? Paul pressed forward towards the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. He felt he was a saved man, and he meant through the same grace to be a holy man. He longed to grasp the crown, and hear the "Well done, good and faithful servant," which his Master would award him at the end of his course.

Brethren and sisters, I wish I could stir myself and stir you to a passionate longing after a gracious, consistent, godly life, yea, for an eminently, solidly, thoroughly devoted and consecrated life. You will grieve the Spirit if you walk inconsistently; you will dishonor the Lord that bought you; you will weaken the church; you will bring shame upon yourself. Even though you be "saved so as by fire," it will be an evil and a bitter thing to have in any measure departed from God.

**But to be always going onward, to be never self-satisfied, to be always laboring to be better Christians, to be aiming at the rarest sanctity, this shall be your honored the church's comfort, and the glory of God. May the Lord help you to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Amen. ([Philippians 3:13,14 Onward!](#))**

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**ILLUSTRATION** - "Too many Christians are too involved in "many things," when the secret of progress is to concentrate on "one thing." It was this decision that was a turning point in D. L. Moody's life. Before the tragedy of the Chicago fire in 1871, Mr. Moody was involved in Sunday School promotion, YMCA work, evangelistic meetings, and many other activities; but after the fire, he determined to devote himself exclusively to evangelism. "**This one thing I do!**" became a reality to him. As a result, millions of people heard the Gospel...I press!" This same verb is translated "I follow after" in Philippians 3:12, and it carries the idea of intense endeavor. The Greeks used it to describe a hunter eagerly pursuing his prey. A man does not become a winning athlete by listening to lectures, watching movies, reading books, or cheering at the games. He becomes a winning athlete by getting into the game and determining to win! The same zeal that Paul employed when he persecuted the church (Phil. 3:6), he displayed in serving Christ. Come to think of it, wouldn't it be wonderful if Christians put as much determination into their spiritual life as they do their golfing, fishing, or bowling? **There are two extremes to avoid here: (1) "I must do it all" and (2) "God must do it all!"** The first describes the activist, the second the quietist, and both are heading for failure. "Let go and let God!" is a clever slogan, but it does not fully describe the process of Christian living. What quarterback would say to his team, "OK, men, just let go and let the coach do it all!" On the other hand, no quarterback would say, "Listen to me and forget what the coach says!" Both extremes are wrong." ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

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**Ray Pritchard on THIS ONE THING** - Note the fierce concentration implicit in the words "one thing I do." Here is a secret that applies across the board. To excel in any area of life, a person must say, "This one thing I do," not "These 20 things I do." A single-minded focus in any endeavor generally wins a great reward. A person must say, "This one thing I do," not "These 20 things I do."

- A great artist must say, "One thing I do."
- A gifted teacher must say, "One thing I do."

- A championship athlete must say, "One thing I do."
- A single parent raising her child must say, "One thing I do."
- A student who wants to graduate with honors must say, "One thing I do."

Greatness in any arena comes to those who can say with the Apostle Paul, **'One thing I do.'** In his case, it meant looking to the heavenly goal of winning the prize. That phrase covers all that God has for us when we finally stand before Jesus Christ and hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord."

Most of us would rather say, "Many things I do" and it would be true because we are fragmented people. But Paul (who was the consummate man of action) could truthfully say, "One thing I do."

**ILLUSTRATION OF THIS ONE THING** - One hundred years ago a young man ([William Borden](#) of Borden's milk [{WATCH THIS 2:50 MINUTE VIDEO ENCAPSULATING BORDEN'S LIFE AND PASSION FOR "THIS ONE THING!"}](#)) from a wealthy family entered Yale University. His family intended that after completing his degree he would enter a suitable career in America. But God gripped his heart with the needs of China and he volunteered to go to that country with the gospel, much to the dismay of his family and friends. He decided first to study Islam and Arabic in Cairo, where he contracted spinal meningitis. He never made it to China, succumbing to this disease in the prime of his life at age 25. After his death, a note was found in his Bible that summarized his life: **"No reserve, no retreat, no regrets."** I wonder how many of us could say the same thing?

**Robert Morgan - This One Thing** - The phrase one thing occurs several times in the Bible, pointing to God's priorities for us. The word priority comes from the term prior, something coming before something else. Here are some ultimate priorities for us:

1. Worship God! "I have asked one thing from the Lord; it is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, gazing on the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4).
2. Put Christ above all else! "You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have.... Then come, follow Me" (Mark 10:21).
3. Sit at Jesus' feet studying His Word! "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41).
4. Tell what Jesus has done for you! "One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!" (John 9:25).
5. Don't look backward but forward! "One thing I do: forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus!" (Phil. 3:13-14).
6. Be ready for Christ's return! "Dear friends, don't let this one thing escape you:... the Day of the Lord will come like a thief" (2 Pet. 3:8, 10).
7. Beware lest the many things crowd out the one thing today. (My All in All)

**Adrian Rogers** - The two events or sports achievements in my life have been football and track. I know something about running a race. And, I know this much: When you are in the starting block, and you put those spikes on, and you get set, you don't have any side issues. You say, as you look at the goal, "This one thing I do." Every ounce, every inch, every nerve, every fiber, every breath, every corpuscle is moving toward the goal, if you want to win. Now, concentration is the secret of power—to bring one's life into a burning focus. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). James said, "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). To be powerful, you narrow your interests. Sometimes, people say, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." No, put all your eggs in one basket, and watch that basket. What is that one basket? "Oh, that I may know Him—that I may know Him. This one thing I do." Again, concentration is the secret of power. Let water spread over the real estate, and you have a stagnant swamp. Channel it, and you can have a power dam. Diffuse light, and it spreads over this auditorium. Concentrate it—it become laser that can burn through steel. Concentration—everything else has to become subservient to your master goal. Now, when, sometimes, you talk about saying—or when, sometimes, when we say—"This one thing I do," people mentally argue. They say, "Now, wait a minute. Pastor, I've got a job. And, I need rest; and I need recreation; and I need friends; and I need food—I need all of these things; so, how can you say, "This one this I do"? All of these things, friend, are subservient to that one thing. And, any of these things that keep you from that main thing, for you, is an impediment.

If life is to have meaning, and if God's will is to be done, all of us have to accept who we are and what we are, give it back to God, and thank Him for the way He made us. What I am is God's gift to me; **what I do** with it is my gift to Him. —Warren W. Wiersbe

The great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving. To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it—but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor. —Oliver Wendell Holmes

Striving for Discipline - Beware of saying, "I haven't time to read the Bible, or to pray"; say rather, "I haven't disciplined myself to do these things." —Oswald Chambers

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**SINGLE-MINDEDNESS** - Vladimir Lenin was the fanatical architect of the former USSR. A colleague once said of him,

"Lenin thinks about nothing but revolution. He talks about nothing but revolution. He eats and drinks revolution. And if he dreams at night, he must dream about revolution."

No matter how much we deplore Lenin's fanaticism and all the evil that came from it, we must recognize that his single-minded passion not only helped him accomplish his goals but affected the entire course of history. What is our ruling passion? Is there some cause, some sport, some hobby, some project that fills us with enthusiasm, focuses our energies, and commands the untiring investment of our time and thought and money? In light of what God says has eternal significance, what value does our passion really possess? The apostle Paul expressed a worthy goal when he wrote,

"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, cp Acts 20:32).

To know Jesus Christ, to trust Him, to love Him, and to serve Him--that is a passion with eternal value. --V C Grounds [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Living for Jesus who died in my place,  
Bearing on Calv'ry my sin and disgrace;  
Such love constrains me to answer His call,  
Follow His leading, and give Him my all. --Chisholm

**Without a heart aflame for God,  
we cannot shine for Jesus.**

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**Robert Boardman** has an article entitled "**Only One Thing**" - Below are excerpts...

To be single-minded means to have only one aim or pose. The Christian man or woman whose highest aim purpose is to worship and serve God must learn how to say no to other things in order to accomplish this priority. For, as E. Stanley Jones wrote, "Your capacity to say No determines your capacity to say Yes to greater things." (Ed comment: I actually might reverse the order -- I think our power to say "no" is enhanced when we say "yes" to God.)...Let's examine four vital facets: our devotion to Christ, our convictions, our prayer, and our ministry.

**(1) SINGLE-MINDED DEVOTION TO CHRIST** - "One thing is needed" (Luke 10:42) Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). Who is your true master? Is Jesus Christ himself the object of your highest devotion—or do you have another master?

The lack of undivided loyalty to Christ was Martha's problem in Luke 10. She was "distracted by all the preparations," and had put her ministry and service ahead of time spent with Jesus. After noting Martha's anxiety over "many things" while her sister Mary sat at his feet, Jesus told Martha, "Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." The discussion notes on this passage in Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's Commentary include this insight "Martha's choice would be taken from her, for her services would die with her, Mary's never, being spiritual and eternal. Both were true-hearted disciples, but one was absorbed in the higher, the other in the lower of two ways of honoring their common Lord."Are you growing in your knowledge of and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ? Or have you become a skilled ministry technician, indulging in elaborate preparations and service but forgetting the One about whom everything in life ought to revolve?

**(2) SINGLE-MINDED CONVICTION** - "One thing I do know" (John 9:25) "Convictions," said Francis C. Kelley, "are the mainsprings of action, the driving powers of life. What a man lives are his convictions." The blind man healed by Jesus in John 9 had a deep, unshaken conviction. His conviction matched in depth the distress he had known before Jesus restored his sight. As is so often true, whoever is forgiven much, loves much and also develops strong convictions.....Having convictions does not mean we should be rigid and inflexible in everything. We need strong convictions regarding scriptural principles, principles which do not change with cultural trends or circumstances. But in our relationships with other Christians we need to be loving and flexible.....

**(3) SINGLE-MINDED PRAYER** - "One thing I ask of the Lord" (Psalm 27:4) David's words in Psalm 27:4 are single-minded prayer at its highest and best....David's prayer is centered on the right target—to behold the Lord's beauty in his dwelling place. Is there any greater satisfaction than to come before God's throne in believing prayer, concentrating on one thing and seeing it come to pass? Are the requests of your prayer life single-minded, or are they vague and general? In one forty-day prayer season,

Navigator's founder Dawson Trotman prayed with another man every morning from five o'clock until time to go to work, asking the Lord specifically for **"men with hearts single for your glory."** First they prayed that these men would come from their hometown of Lomita, California. Then, as their boldness and confidence grew, they prayed for men from the entire Long Beach area. Next their hearts encompassed all of Los Angeles, then all of California. Then these two men petitioned God for men and women from every one of the forty-eight states. Finally, with a world map in front of them in their prayer hideaway, they prayed over every continent in the world. Today, more than two thousand Navigator staff men and women are ministering in more than forty nations around the world. These laborers are, by God's grace, the answer to the believing, single-minded prayers of Dawson Trotman and of many others of God's people. "Lord, give us men and women with hearts single for your glory"—this kind of prayer should be prayed through an entire lifetime, prayer that consumes you and never leaves you. It is sustained prayer, rather than a request that is soon forgotten. And it is maturing prayer, prayer that grows as you yourself grow spiritually.....

**(4) A SINGLE-MINDED MINISTRY** - "One thing I do" (Philippians 3:13) "—not 'Ten things I dabble at,'" as Dawson Trotman liked to say.

So many of us are dabblers in the ministry, getting sidetracked from the task God has called us to. We dip in and out of things, tasting this and that. We're extremely busy, but not really honing in on a God-given calling and being productive in a deep, abiding sense. To have a single-minded ministry you will have to pay the price. There is always sacrifice in making the choice, "One thing I do."....What does God want you to do? What is your God-given ministry? Are you following it? In making these hard choices, you may be called on to lose your popularity, your reputation, some friends, and much understanding by others. Are you willing to pay that price?...."There is a time," wrote H. V. Prochnow, "when we must firmly choose the course we will follow, or the relentless drift of events will make the decision." Perhaps that time for you is now. "Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. (Psalm 86:11)

**See Related Discussion** - Give Me An Undivided Heart

#### **FORGETTING WHAT LIES BEHIND: ta men opisō epilanthanomenos (PMPMSN):**

- Ps 45:10; Lk 9:62; 2 Cor 5:16; Heb 6:1- note
- Click John MacArthur's exposition [Reaching for the Prize](#)
- [Philippians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### **FORGETTING THE PAST**

Focused concentration is clearly implied by the phrase **"one thing"**, in context the result of first a negative action (forgetting) and then a positive one (reaching).

**Adrian Rogers** says **"Satan binds us to the past, but Jesus frees you for the future.** Satan would like to keep you bound to the past." Put your eye on the goal, and keep it there; and, forget the past. One thing I have learned about running a race: You cannot run a good race by looking over your shoulder. It's a good way to fall. Forget the past. **ILLUSTRATION** Lot's wife looked back, turned into a pillar of salt. A little boy in Sunday School said, "Well, that's nothing. My mother was going to the grocery store, looked back, and turned into a telephone pole." You can't drive a car looking back. Now, you can't run a race looking back. Paul said, "Forgetting those things which are behind" (Philippians 3:13). What are things that we need to forget in our lives? Past guilt. If you will look, in this same chapter, look in verse 6, concerning zeal, persecuting the Church—Paul knew the things that he had done, and they were terrible. But, he refused to be haunted by the ghost of guilt. He buried those things in the grave of God's forgetfulness. But, not only past guilt—past glory. I mean, what things he had—incredible things—but look in verse 7: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Philippians 3:7). Again, when I was playing football, we would go to play against another team. Our coach would say, "Boys, put away your press clippings. That other team hasn't read them." Forget the past failures, your past guilt, your past glory, your past grief. In this passage, Paul talks about false brethren, people who had done him wrong. But, he refused to be drinking the intoxicating cup of self-pity. Jamie, in the Christian life, there will be those who will criticize you. Sometimes, people say to me, "Oh, Pastor Rogers, we are just so blessed to have you as our pastor. Everybody loves you." I say, "You ought to read some of my mail. Not everybody loves me." I don't want to be loved by everybody. Jesus said, "Beware when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). There are those who would give you grief. But, you can suffer; you can have sickness, and sorrow, and financial reverse. Don't sit around licking your wounds and drinking from that intoxicating cup. Paul said, "I forget that." Paul forgot past grudges. There is nothing that will stultify your Christian life more than carrying a grudge. Refuse it. Don't let it get into your life. Tell Jesus on them, and let it go. Paul said, "I forget those things which are behind, and I am pressing forward" (Philippians 3:13). I have read somewhere that, at the foot of the Alps, there is the grave of an Englishman. He was climbing one of those Swiss mountains, an icy slope, and he fell to his death. And, on his grave marker is this epitaph: "He died climbing"—"He died climbing." When he was

in his 90s, Dr. Lee had a massive heart attack—former pastor of this church. I quoted him, this morning. He was in Oklahoma City. His long lifetime friend, Herschel Hobbs, came to see him. Herschel Hobbs, Brother Jim, is a great Bible scholar. You met and know Herschel Hobbs. Herschel Hobbs was, in many ways, called Mr. Southern Baptist. He came to see his old friend, Dr. Lee; he called him Bob. Most of us would not have called him Bob, but Herschel did. Most of us would not have called Herschel Herschel. But, Dr. Hobbs came to see Dr. Lee—let's put it that way. And, he came to see this man with a massive heart attack. What do you think they talked about? Herschel Hobbs told me later. He said, "Dr. Lee looked at me, when I came to pray for him. He said, 'Herschel, there is a passage of Scripture that I have been thinking about. I want you to do me a favor. Would you do an exegesis on this passage of Scripture? Unravel that, and come back, and tell me what it means.'" Here is a man with a massive heart attack. What did he want? More about Jesus would I know. I want to die climbing. I want to be learning more and more about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **Now, friend, Satan chains us to the past. Jesus frees us for the future.** Aren't you glad that you can draw a line tonight, and you can step over that line, get in the starting block, and forget that, and say, "Now, I am running this race; the burning goal of my life is that I may know Him personally, that I may know Him powerfully, that I may know Him passionately, that I may know Him preeminently, that I may know the Lord Jesus Christ; and, I am not going to stop running until I come to the end of the race, and I hear Him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'"? There is no thrill like being in the race, and there will be no greater joy than to have Him put a crown on your head and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

**Vance Havner** - Memories, whether good or bad, must be handled with care. Bad recollections can drive us to despair. Good remembrances can become idols and lead us to wallow in sentimentality. We can paint the past with glamour it never had and crown dear ones with haloes they never wore. "Distance lends enchantment to the view." Memory can become a tyrant instead of a treasure chest. From the mistakes of the past, let us learn whatever lessons they teach, then forget them, even as God remembers our sins no more. Let precious memories be blessings but not bonds. Life must be lived and we must get on with the job.

**Forgetting** (1950) (**epilanthanomai** from **epi** = in or upon - intensifies meaning of following verb + **lanthano** = lie hidden or concealed) conveys 2 basic nuances in the NT, to **forget** (not recall information concerning something) or to **neglect** (give little attention to, to omit by carelessness or design).

The **epi**- preposition intensifies the meaning as noted and thus the idea is not just forgetting but **"completely forgetting."** The present tense indicates that this is to be the Spirit filled believer's continual exercise - forget and forget completely!

Paul makes a conscious (Spirit empowered) choice to not recall information concerning things in his past that would only encumber his running with endurance.

Paul uses an illustration of a Greek runner completely **forgetting** his opponents he is leading in a race (see **Related Resource - Athletic Metaphor**). Paul knew if the runner began to think of the men behind him, the pounding of their pace, his speed might slacken. So Paul presses home the lesson that when a child of God remembers his past failures, the things he should have done and failed to do, the things he did which he should not have done -- all of these have the potential to impede or hinder our forward progress in the Christian life. When a Christian has confessed and sought the gift of repentance and made things "right" with God and his fellow-man, the next step is to completely forget them.

As **Wuest** explains if we focus backward as those who are marching onward to Zion our "onward progress is hindered should he dwell on the past full of failures and sins, full of heartaches and discouragements, full of disappointments and thwarted hopes and plans. As long as a Christian has made things right with God and man, he should completely forget the past. ([Philippians Commentary Online- Recommended](#))

**Epilanthanomai** is used 8 times in the NT and about

**Matthew 16:5** And the disciples came to the other side and had **forgotten** to take bread.

**Mark 8:14** And they had **forgotten** to take bread; and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them.

**Luke 12:6** "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is **forgotten** before God.

**Philippians 3:13** Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: **forgetting** what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,

**Hebrews 6:10** (note) For God is not unjust so as to **forget** your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

**Hebrews 13:2** (note) Do not **neglect** to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

**Hebrews 13:16** (note) And do not **neglect** doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

**James 1:24** (note) for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately **forgotten** what kind of person he was.

**Epilanthanomai** - Used 98 in the Septuagint (LXX) (Note especially the **uses in the Psalms** which makes an interesting and sad study to see who and what was forgotten.

Ge 27:45; 40:23; 41:30, 51; Deut. 4:9, 23, 31; 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19; 9:7; 24:19; 25:19; 26:13; 31:21; 32:18; Jdg. 3:7; 1 Sam. 12:9; 2Ki. 17:38; Job 8:13; 9:27; 11:16; 19:14; 28:4; 39:15;

Ps. 9:12, 17, 18; 10:11, 12; 13:1; 31:12; 42:9; 44:17, 20, 24; 45:10; 50:22; 59:11; 74:19, 23; 77:9; 78:7, 11; 88:12; 102:4; 103:2; 106:13, 21; 119:16, 30, 61, 83, 93, 109, 139, 141, 153, 176; 137:5;

Pr. 2:17; 3:1; 4:5; 31:5, 7; Eccl. 2:16; 9:5; Isa. 23:16; 44:21; 49:14f; 51:13; 54:4; 65:11, 16; Jer. 2:32; 3:21; 13:25; 14:9; 18:15; 20:11; 23:27, 40; 30:14; 44:9; 50:5f; Lam. 2:6; 3:17; 5:20; Ezek. 22:12; 23:35; Hos. 2:13; 4:6; 8:14; 13:6; Amos 8:7)

We may need to renew our minds and refresh our thinking on the nature of God's "memory" regarding our past confessed sins, failures, rebellious acts, etc. Take a moment and meditate prayerfully and thankfully on the truth in the following glorious Scriptures (and then beloved... press on):

"Who is a God like Thee, Who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant (refers to Jews who believe in Messiah - **click** for more on "the remnant") ) of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love (His motive for His unchanging forgiveness). He will again have compassion on us (**the literal interpretation refers to the Jews who place their faith in Messiah, but the principle is applicable to all believers who confess and repent as are the other OT passages quoted below**). He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19) **And all God's people shouted "Hallelujah!"**

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

(King Hezekiah speaking in the days when he had become mortally ill and sought Jehovah) "Lo, for my own welfare I had great bitterness. It is Thou Who hast kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, for Thou hast cast all (how many?) my sins behind Thy back. (Isaiah 38:17)

"I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins." (Isaiah 43:25)

"If we walk in the light (which will expose darkness or unconfessed sins) as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1John 1:7) (See also the booklet [The Forgiveness of God](#))

**Forgetting** is in the **present tense** indicating that he was continually forgetting. This was his pattern. Not perfection but direction is the idea! **Forgetting** is also in the **middle voice** which means that the "runner" initiates & participates in benefits thereof. Paul is saying in essence that to keep one's focus "Don't look back." How many times we've watched in dismay as a lead runner looks back over their shoulder only to get passed on the other side or to slow them just enough to allow the opponent to pass them by. Don't look back dear saint. Make a break with the past. Nothing is happening back there is relevant. Yes it's fine and biblical to make memorial stones of remembrance but avoid making the stumbling stones of past memories. To grow toward Christlikeness, face up to your failures, then focus on Christ for the future.

**Expositor's Bible Commentary - Forgetting** did not mean obliterating the memory of the past (Paul has just recalled some of these things in Php 3:5, 6, 7), but a conscious refusal to let them absorb his attention and impede his progress. He never allowed his Jewish heritage (Php 3:5, 6, 7) nor his previous Christian attainments (Php 3:9, 10, 11, 12) to obstruct his running of the race. No present attainment could lull him into thinking he already possessed all Christ desired for him. ([Gaebelein, F. Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan Publishing](#))

**Lehman Strauss** - Quoting Sir William Osler, R. A. Herring says, "The load of tomorrow added to that of yesterday, and carried today, makes the strongest falter." With many of us that tendency to live in the past prevails. We either rest on some accomplishment as though we have arrived, or else we live in the sagging spirit of regret over past failures. Forget the past and press on with the determination that each new day will find you more like Christ. Never look back on your past in such a way that it impedes further progress. Retrospection can be very depressing. Jesus said: "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32), of whom Moses wrote: "But his wife looked back... and she became a pillar of salt" (Gen. 19:26). There is no bright future for the Christian who wastes time dwelling on the past...The "race" is the life of faith and obedience, that pursuit of personal holiness that ever looks to the Saviour. The prime requisite for running well is not that of speed, but of rigorous self-discipline and vigorous endeavor, that we might reach the goal of victory over the power of indwelling sin, and perfect conformity to the lovely likeness of Jesus Christ. So that we may achieve the goal we are exhorted to "lay aside every weight," that is, we must get rid of every ounce of surplus flesh, train

down to the least minimum. Some Christians choose to retain a superfluity of weights and cling to some besetting sin, and then they have the audacity to complain about how hard it is to get along as a Christian. The race of life is a lengthy one, extending throughout the whole of our earthly experience, and it calls forth everything that is within us.

**Rod Mattoon** - In a race, the runner's progress is hindered if he keeps looking back. The runner's stride is broken; he can trip or lose his balance too. Looking back gets his focus off the finish line and on his opponent. This is what happens when we dwell on the success and failures of the past. We either rest on some accomplishment as though we have arrived, or else we live in a sagging spirit of regret over past failures. This kind of thinking hinders us from being what God wants us to be and doing what God's will is for our lives. God wants us to forget and press onward with the determination that each day will find us more like Christ. **Never look back on your yesterdays in such a way that it slows your progress.** This is exactly what Israel did in the book of Numbers. The Jews did not forget about the delicacies of the past and wanted to go back to the lifestyle they once had. They failed to trust God with their present and future. Numbers 11:5-6 (Treasures from Philipians)

**Albert Barnes** has a lengthy comment writing that...

There is an allusion here undoubtedly to the Grecian races. One running to secure the prize would not stop to look behind him to see how much ground he had run over, or who of his competitors had fallen or lingered in the way. He would keep his eye steadily on the prize, and strain every nerve that he might obtain it. If his attention was diverted for a moment from that, it would hinder his flight, and might be the means of his losing the crown. So the apostle says it was with him. He looked onward to the prize. He fixed the eye intently on that. It was the single object in his view, and he did not allow his mind to be diverted from that by anything--not even by the contemplation of the past. He did not stop to think of the difficulties which he had overcome, or the troubles which he had met, but he thought of what was yet to be accomplished. This does not mean that he would not have regarded a proper contemplation of the past life as useful and profitable for a Christian, (Ep 2:11-note) but that he would not allow any reference to the past to interfere with the one great effort to win the prize.

It may be, and is, profitable for a Christian to look over the past mercies of God to his soul, in order to awaken emotions of gratitude in the heart, and to think of his shortcomings and errors, to produce penitence and humility. But none of these things should be allowed, for one moment, to divert the mind from the purpose to win the incorruptible crown. And it may be remarked in general, that a Christian will make more rapid advances in piety by looking forward than by looking backward.

**Forward**, we see everything to cheer and animate us--the crown of victory, the joys of heaven, the society of the blessed-- the Saviour beckoning to us, and encouraging us.

**Backward**, we see everything to dishearten and to humble. Our own unfaithfulness; our coldness, deadness, and dullness; the little zeal and ardour which we have, all are fitted to humble and discourage.

He is the most cheerful Christian who looks onward, and who keeps heaven always in view. He who is accustomed much to dwell on fine past, though he may be a true Christian, will be likely to be melancholy and dispirited, to be a recluse rather than a warm-hearted and active friend of the Saviour. Or if he looks backward to contemplate what he has done--the space that he has run over --the difficulties which he has surmounted--and his own rapidity in the race, he will be likely to become self-complacent and self-satisfied. He will trust in his past endeavours, and feel that the prize is now secure, and will relax his future efforts. Let us, then, look onward. Let us not spend our time either in pondering the gloomy past, and our own unfaithfulness, or in thinking of what we have done, and thus becoming puffed up with self-complacency; but let us keep the eye steadily on the prize, and run the race as though we had just commenced it. (Albert Barnes. Barnes NT Commentary)

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**Illustration** - Those inventive people, the Italians, have a custom. As midnight on New Year's Eve approaches, the streets are dear. There is no traffic; there are no pedestrians; even the policemen take cover. Then, at the stroke of 12, the windows of the houses fly open. To the sound of laughter, music and fireworks, each member of the family pitches out old crockery, detested ornaments, hated furniture and a whole catalogue of personal possessions which remind them of something in the past year they are determined to wipe out of their minds" (Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations).

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**NOT FORGETTING** - There is an illustration....of this attitude in the Old Testament. When God led the people of Israel out of Egypt toward the Promised Land, he provided everything that they needed for their journey. They had shade by day and light by night. They had water to drink and manna to eat. The time came, however, when the people ceased to look forward to the land that God was giving them and instead looked back to their life in Egypt. They said, "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also



the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" (Num. 11:5–6). The people of Israel began to hunger for these things, and God taught them a great lesson by giving them the things they asked for. He gave them quail until they grew sick of it. The point of the illustration, however, is that they began to look back and failed to trust God for their present and future blessings.

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**Illustration** - When Cortez landed at Vera Cruz in 1519 to begin his conquest of Mexico with small force of 700 men, he purposely set fire to his fleet of 11 ships. His men on the shore watched their only means of retreat sinking to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction to move, forward into the Mexican interior to meet whatever might come their way. In paying the price for being Christ's disciple, you too must purposefully destroy all avenues of retreat. Resolve that whatever the price for being His follower, you will have to pay it. *Walter Henricksen, Disciples Are Made—Not Born*

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**ILLUSTRATION OF FORGETTING** (Brian Bill) - To "forget" in the Bible means "to no longer be influenced by or affected by." It's when we don't allow the past to control our present. While we can't wipe stuff out of our memory banks, we can break the power of the past by allowing the Lord to unleash us from its influence. Let me demonstrate with these two bags of garbage that are tied to my neck. The white one represents good garbage and the black bag is the guilty garbage. Both of these bags are filled with garbage that needs to be forgotten. We need to allow the Lord to unleash us from the past (throw the two bags in the garbage can).

Let's be careful about looking back, remembering what happened to Lot's wife in Genesis 19:26: "But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt." As a sprinter straining toward the finish line, don't look behind you. The picture here is of an athlete stretching out his neck, mobilizing every muscle, giving all that he has to win the race. You can't run forward by looking backward. One pastor used a creative title for his sermon on this passage that says it all, "Yesterday ended last night." If you want to move forward, you have to let go of what's behind because your past can be a prison.

Look not back on yesterday  
So full of failure and regret;  
Look ahead and seek God's way –  
All sins confessed you must forget.

In a Daily Bread devotional called ["Seeing or Remembering \(full devotional\)"](#), there's a story about a man who was slowly losing his memory. The doctor told him that surgery might reverse this condition and restore his memory but a nerve might be severed in the process, causing total blindness. The surgeon asked the patient: "What would you rather have, your sight or your memory?" The man pondered the question for a few minutes and then replied, "My sight, because I would rather see where I'm going than remember where I've been." Do you see where you're going or are you tripped up by the trash of your past?

Onward and upward your course plan today,  
Seeking new heights as you walk Jesus' way;  
Heed not past failures, but strive for the prize,  
Aiming for goals fit for His holy eyes. —Brandt

If you keep looking back, you can't make spiritual progress.

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Don't let yesterday use up too much of today. —Will Rogers

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**ILLUSTRATION OF FORGETTING THE THINGS BEHIND** - On August 7, 1954, during the British Empire Games in Vancouver, Canada, the greatest mile-run matchup ever took place. It was touted as the "**MIRACLE MILE**" because Britisher Roger Bannister and Australian John Landy were the only two sub-four-minute milers in the world. Bannister had been the first man ever to run a four-minute mile. Both runners were in peak condition. I remember as a junior high boy carefully turning the pages, examining the photos of the famous runners in *Life* magazine, and absorbing the statistics and predictions. Roger Bannister, M.D., who became Sir Roger Bannister and master of an Oxford college, strategized that he would relax during the third lap and save everything for his finishing drive. But as they began that third lap, the Australian poured it on, stretching his already substantial lead. Immediately Bannister adjusted his strategy, increasing his pace and gaining on Landy.

The lead was quickly cut in half, and at the bell for the final lap they were even. Landy began running even faster, and Bannister followed suit. Both men were flying. Bannister felt he was going to lose if Landy did not slow down. **Then came the famous moment (replayed thousands of times in print and flickering black-and-white celluloid) as at the last stride before the homestretch the crowds roared. Landy could not hear Bannister's footfall and looked back, a fatal lapse of concentration.** ([See picture of the moment when Landy takes his costly look inside just as Bannister attacks outside](#)) Bannister launched his attack ([see video](#)) and won the Empire Games that day by five yards. John Landy's lapse was as old as antiquity. The sports-

knowledgeable Apostle Paul would have seen Landy's mistake in a flash because he knew that to be successful a runner must not look back over his shoulder—he must “forget what lies behind”—because when a runner turns even slightly to glance back, there is a momentary loss of focus and rhythm, incurring the critical loss of a fraction of a second or even seconds. (From Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon)

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It is a mistake to be always turning back to recover the past. The law for Christian living is not backward, but forward; not for experiences that lie behind, but for doing the will of God, which is always ahead and beckoning us to follow. Leave the things that are behind, and reach forward to those that are before, for on each new height to which we attain, there are the appropriate joys that befit the new experience. Don't fret because life's joys are fled. There are more in front. Look up, press forward, the best is yet to be! —F. B. Meyer in Our Daily Walk

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**Illustration** - The Oriental shepherd was always ahead of his sheep. He was in front. Any attempt upon them had to take him into account. Now God is down in front. He is in the tomorrows. It is tomorrow that fills men with dread. But God is there already, and all tomorrows of our life have to pass Him before they can get to us (F B. Meyer, from 1000 New Illustrations by Al Bryant, Zondervan).

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**ILLUSTRATION - Forgetting What Lies Behind**...If you've done the best you can—if you have done what you have to do—there is no use worrying about it, because nothing can change it, and to be in a position of leadership... you have to give thought to what's going to happen the next day and you have to be fresh for... what you have to do the next day. What you're "going" to do is more important than what you have done. —The Words of Harry S. Truman,

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**ILLUSTRATION - You Can't Relive the Past** - Many religious people lament that the first fervors of their conversion have died away. They think—sometimes rightly, but not, I believe, always—that their sins account for this. They may even try by pitiful efforts of will to revive what now seem to have been the golden days. But were those fervors—the operative word is those—ever intended to last? —C. S. Lewis in Letters to Malcolm.

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**HANDLING THE PAST** - Grief refuses to flee the past just because it is gone and things have now changed... Consider when we lose our innocence—when we discover that we can injure and have injured others, that the slate of our lives is not clean. Suddenly we realize that we must travel into the future carrying not just any past, but our particular past, a past that cannot be changed. Whatever freedom means, we are not free to undo this past. The freedom comes in how we relate this past to our future. We can drown ourselves in regret, lose ourselves in nostalgia, or cling to these old injuries and losses. But if we do, it is our "choice," not our destiny. —John C. Raines

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**F W Robertson** has an interesting thought on "forgetting" writing that...

It is not by regretting what is irreparable that true work is to be done, but by making the best of what we are. It is not by complaining that we have not the right tools, but by using well the tools we have. What we are, and where we are is God's providential arrangement—God's doing, though it may be man's misdoing. Life is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best Christian who makes the fewest false steps. He is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes.

**Stephen Olford** writes that...

When Sir Winston Churchill visited the United States during World War II he was heard to say that “if the present quarrels with the past there can be no future.” The point he was making was that we have to accept the past as unalterable and move on from there. To stay and quarrel with it, or be preoccupied with it, is to ruin the future...

In one of his earlier diaries, David Livingstone penned these words: “I have found that I have no unusual endowments of intellect, but I this day resolved that I would be an uncommon Christian” (adapted from Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations)...

One of the subtle devices the Enemy uses to slow us up in our Christian life, is to keep us preoccupied with past failures or successes. If we are going to live lives of holiness and victory, we must forget all that is past; we must leave it behind. Paul had a stunning and, at the same time, deplorable past, but he realized that if he were preoccupied with his past, he would not be able to give his full energy to his present calling. (Olford, S. F. Vol. 2: Institutes of Biblical preaching)

**Dwight Pentecost** comments on **forgetting** writing that...

Paul has left behind him across the Roman world a string of established churches shining as lights in the darkness. The Roman world has the light of the Gospel through these believers, who stretch from Jerusalem all the way westward to Spain. Paul could become complacent, feeling his work is done because of the churches that have been established. Paul could look at that which he has suffered and conclude that he has suffered enough. The saints would agree with him. Over and over again companies of saints waited upon the Apostle Paul as he journeyed toward Jerusalem and urged him not to go to Jerusalem because they knew it would involve physical suffering. But Paul pressed on. Paul could look back on everything he has experienced and say, "It is enough. I will withdraw from the race." But Paul says, "I must forget the things that are behind." Sometimes the blessing of God could lull us into complacency and indifference. We feel that we have earned our right to take our ease and to turn over to others the running of the race. We view ourselves as competitors in a mile relay, in which we are called upon to run a part of the distance and then turn the baton over to someone else and let him continue. Paul's concept is that he is in the race until the Lord Jesus Christ brings him to Himself. Then and only then will the goal be reached. We must beware lest accomplishments and blessings cause us to withdraw from the race.

It is also true that, if we are to reach the goal, **we must forget failures** that may be in the past. Failures can discourage. We start out to run and then trip and fall, and so we give up. We conclude we are not cut out for the race and are content to let someone else run. Failures can bring preoccupation with self just as much as blessings or attainments can. Preoccupation with self can bring discouragement that would cause us to retire before the race is finished. The apostle says, "I must forget those things that are behind." (Pentecost, J. D. . The joy of living : A study of Philippians. Page 149. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications)

**C H Spurgeon** (in the Biblical Illustrator) explains that by saying **forgetting** Paul...

1. Does not mean —

(a) That He forgot the mercy of God he had enjoyed.

(b) That he forgot the sins he had committed.

2. We must follow out his figure. If a racer were to pass most of his fellows, and then look round and rejoice over the distance covered he must lose the race. His only hope is to forget all behind.

(a) So must it be with past sins overcome. Perhaps at this moment you can honestly say, "I have overcome a fierce temper," "I have bestirred a naturally indolent spirit." Stop long enough to say, "Thank God for that"; but do not pause to congratulate yourselves, or it may be soon undone. **The easiest way to give resurrection to old corruptions is to erect a trophy over their graves.** Yonder friend is very humble, but if he were to boast of it there would be an end of it.

(b) So with all the work we have done. Some people have good memories as to their performances. They used to serve God wonderfully when they were young. In middle life they wrought marvels, but now they rest on their oars. As long as you are in the world forget what you have done, and go forward — individuals, churches, denominations. (Bolding added)

In his painting "An Allegory of Prudence," the 16th-century Venetian artist Titian portrayed Prudence as a man with three heads. One head was of a youth facing the future, another of a mature man eyeing the present, and the third, a wise old man gazing at the past. Over their heads Titian wrote a Latin phrase that means, "From the example of the past, the man of the present acts prudently so as not to imperil the future." We need that kind of wisdom to overcome the anxiety created by our past failures and the fear of repeating them in the future--an anxiety that can keep us from enjoying life to the fullest right now. Never let a bleak past cloud our bright future which is grounded in Christ Jesus. (adapted from [Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The well-known preacher **Henry Ward Beecher** (1813-1887) speaking of the beginning of a new year declared: "We have passed through one more year. One more long stage in the journey of life, with its ascents and descents and dust and mud and rocks and thorns and burdens that wear the shoulders, is done. The old year is dead. Roll it away. Let it go. God, in His providence, has brought us out of it. It is gone; ... its evil is gone; its good remains. The evil has perished, and the good survives."

**Alexander Maclaren** has an interesting view of what to "**forget**" writing that - You find some certain type of Christian character, or exercise of Christian grace, that is easy and natural to you, and you come to know how to do it. It becomes your special habit, which is all right, but it also tends to become your limit, which is wrong. Habits are like fences, very good to guard the soul from sudden incursions of trespassers, but very bad when the trunk has grown up and presses against their stubborn rings. And many of us simply keep on doing the narrow round of things that we fancy we can do well, or have always been in the way of doing, like barrel

organs, grinding our poor little set of tunes, without any notion of the great sea of music that stretches all round about us, and which is not pegged out upon our cylinders at all.

This is what Paul is saying believers are to do. Those who know the Lord Jesus as their Savior can let go of the past and move ahead with assurance because Jesus provides forgiveness and hope. Having confessed our sins, we can confidently press on into the future. Remembering God's faithfulness and forgetting past mistakes can make pressing on a time of joyous anticipation.

Look not back on yesterday  
So full of failure and regret;  
Look ahead and seek God's way—  
All sin confessed you must forget. –DJD

**Never let a dark *past*  
cloud a bright *future*.**

**Behind** ([3694](#)) (**opiso** from **opis** = a looking back) means backwards and can apply to place and time.

**What** are “**the things which are behind**”? What is Paul referring to? In short, everything that is passing away, everything that when “struck” lacks to ring of eternity, the “good” things, the great human achievements (eg those “religious” achievements Paul described earlier in this chapter), the virtuous deeds, etc. In short all those things the world seeks after and so futilely cling to as if these things give their lives temporal and eternal meaning, purpose and significance. **What is it that is in your grip and God has been gently “prying” your fingers so that you might release it?**

**What else?** Forget the bad things too - the sins, the failures, the disasters. Why? Because it has nothing to do with our glorious future. Now Paul is not saying that if we have unresolved conflicts, broken relationships, unconfessed sins, etc, that we should not deal with them! That is not his point. **In fact take a moment and pray Psalm 139:23,24 (noting carefully there are six commands!) and then do business with God...**

**Search** (a command - yes, God is inviting us and privileging us to “command” Him!) me, O God, and **know** (also a command) my heart (the secret place of my life). **Try** (a command) me and **know** (also a command) my anxious (word study) thoughts; and **see** (a command) if there be any hurtful (wicked) way in me, and **lead** (a command) me in the everlasting way. (Psalm 139:23-24) (See [Spurgeon's note v23; Verse 24](#))

Paul's point is that on one hand the saint cannot **live on** past victories. On the other hand, he or she should never **be debilitated** by past (confessed) sins. And yet so many believers are so distracted by the past that they are weighed down and encumbered to the point that they can barely run for the future (see note on **lay aside every encumbrance** Hebrews 12:1). Paul is saying that the saint who would run to win must completely forget those things which encumber. Picture for a moment, a runner moving forward and at the same time looking backward! It is not an effective way to run for the goal (“gold”) beloved! Let us all run that when we break the tape we hear the Judge say “Well, done.” Why “well done”? Because we have been faithful (in the “big and small” things).

The runner who takes his eyes off the goal is in danger of losing direction and motivation. He or she must not be distracted by the crowds cheers or their jeers and must not let other runners distract them from the course and the focus... **one thing**. And so... When the devil brings up your past, remind yourself of your future!

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**Question: “Is forgetting the past biblical? Does the Bible instruct us to forget the past?”**(from [Gotquestions - highly recommended resource](#))

**Answer:** The apostle Paul ends a section in Philippians 3 by saying, “One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (verses 13–14). Is Paul instructing us to forget everything that ever happened before we met Christ? Is this a command to purge our minds of all memories?

It is important to consider the passage that precedes these words. Paul had just listed all his religious qualifications that, to the Jewish mind, were of supreme importance. He then states, “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (verse 8). Paul is making the point that no fleshly accomplishment matters in comparison with knowing Christ and trusting in His righteousness alone for salvation (Ephesians 2:8–9). Regardless of how good or how bad we may have been, we must all come to Christ the same way: humble, repentant, and undeserving of His forgiveness (Romans 5:8; Titus 3:5).

The word *forgetting* in this passage means “no longer caring for, neglecting, refusing to focus on.” Our memories store millions of pieces of information gained through our senses since birth. **Some experiences are impossible to forget, and any effort to forget them only makes them more prominent. Paul is not advising a memory wipe; he is telling us to focus on the present**

**and the future, rather than the past.**

**It's easy to "live in the past."** Whether it's a past victory that our minds continually replay or a past defeat that hangs over us like a shroud, it needs to be left in the past. Nothing hinders present service quite like being mired in another time. Modeling Paul's forgetfulness means we count the past as nothing. We cut the strings that tie us to that bygone moment. We refuse to allow past successes to inflate our pride. We refuse to allow past failures to deflate our self-worth. We leave it behind and instead adopt our new identity in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

**We are not to forget everything, however, in the sense of being oblivious to it.** In fact, there are many times God instructs us to remember. In Deuteronomy 9:7, Moses tells the Israelites to "remember this and never forget how you aroused the anger of the Lord your God in the wilderness. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord." We are encouraged to remember all God has done for us (Psalm 77:11; 103:2), others who are suffering for Christ's sake (Hebrews 13:3; Colossians 4:18), and what we were before Jesus saved us (Ephesians 2:11–12; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11). But the remembering should be to the glory of God and for our spiritual benefit. If we are cleansed by the blood of Christ, then no judgment remains for past failures (Romans 8:1). If God chooses not to remember our past sins (Hebrews 8:12), we can choose to set them aside as well and embrace the future He promises to those who love Him (Romans 8:28; Ephesians 2:10).

- See related question - [How should a Christian deal with feelings of guilt regarding past sins, whether pre- or post-salvation?](#)

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**Adoniram Judson** once wrote

A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity... If it has been a useless life, it can never be improved. Such will stand forever and ever. The same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever. All the marks which we put upon it, it will exhibit forever... Each day will not only be a witness of our conduct, but will affect our everlasting destiny (**Note:** Not in loss of salvation but of rewards - cp 1Co 3:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, Jn 15:5, 2Co 5:10-[note](#), cp 1Ti 4:7, 8-[note](#)). No day will lose its share of influence in determining where shall be our seat in heaven. How shall we then wish to see each day marked with usefulness! It will then be too late to mend its appearance. It is too late to mend the days that are past. The future is in our power. Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly marked. (See page 33-34 of [A memoir of the life and labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson](#))

This is "**Coram Deo**" living before the face of God, "**Carpe Diem**" seizing the day, because "**Tempus Fugit**", time flies and so our daily prayer should be "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom." (Ps 90:12)

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**W P Insley** (The Biblical Illustrator) sums up Christian progress:

I. THE THINGS BEHIND WHICH ARE TO BE FORGOTTEN.

1. Past sinful pleasures.
2. Past evil acquaintances.
3. Past good works.

II. THE THINGS BEFORE.

1. Increased holiness.
2. The prize of eternal glory.

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The **Illinois Medical Journal Article - Why We Must Learn to Forget the Past:** There are two days in every week about which we should not worry—two days which should be kept from fear and apprehension.

One of these days is Yesterday with its mistakes and cares, its aches and pains, its faults and blunders. Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. All the money in the world cannot bring back Yesterday. We cannot undo a single act we performed; we cannot erase a single word we said. Yesterday is gone.

The other day we should not worry about is Tomorrow with its possible adversities, its burdens, its large promise and poor performance. Tomorrow is beyond our immediate control. Tomorrow's sun will rise either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds—

but it will rise. Until it does, we have no stake in Tomorrow, for it is as yet unborn.

That leaves only one day—Today. Any man, by the grace of God, can fight the battles of just one day. It is only when you and I add the burdens of those two awful eternities—Yesterday and Tomorrow—that we break down.

It is not the experience of Today that drives men mad—it is remorse or bitterness for something which happened Yesterday and the dread of what Tomorrow may bring. Let us, therefore, journey but one day at a time. ([John Lawrence, Life's Choices, Multnomah Press, Portland, 1982, pp. 111-112](#))

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**Grantland Rice** gives an interesting illustration of forgetting (in *The Tumult and the Shouting*) writing that...

Because golf expresses the flaws of the human swing—a basically simple maneuver—it causes more self-torture than any game short of Russian roulette. The quicker the average golfer can forget the shot he has dubbed or knocked off line—and concentrate on the next shot—the sooner he begins to improve and enjoy golf. Little good comes from brooding about the mistakes we've made. The next shot, in golf or in life, is the big one.

Paul is giving essentially the same advice in this verse, emphasizing that the key to forward movement in the Christian race is to set our eyes on the goal and keep looking ahead, because when we look back to our past sin, we open the door to discouragement. What do you do when the past begins to "slow you down"? When past sin gets you down, when you find yourself brooding about it, or when you become discouraged because of a specific failure, if you've not yet done so, then confess it to God (He already knows and is waiting to hear you humble yourself and accept responsibility), claim His complete, "no strings attached" forgiveness, and put it behind. In our race toward the goal of every increasing Christlikeness, as in golf, the next shot is the big one. And as a corollary, it's always too soon to quit.

**Hampton Keathley** has this advice on **forgetting**...

We Cannot Do Anything About Last Year's Harvest. Whatever we did last year, last month, last week, even yesterday is over and past. There are no time machines to take us back so we can change what we did yesterday. Nothing we do today can in any way change the record of what was sown and what was or will be reaped as a consequence. It is either a harvest that will be worthy of praise or burning—or perhaps portions of both—but whatever was produced stands as the record of the lives we live on this earth. The problem with all too many Christians is that they are not forgetting the past and reaching on to what is before (Php 3:13, 14).

If we failed to produce a crop worthy of the Lord's praise last year our brooding and wallowing in self-pity for having wasted this time will only cause us to fail to produce anything glorifying to the Lord this year. If we did use the opportunities the Lord gave us and produced a harvest of good things, we cannot rest on our laurels. This is another year; and just because the Holy Spirit led and blessed last year, as we were obedient to Him and the Word, does not mean that we automatically will produce anything good this year.

We Must Learn to Live With the Consequences of Our Failures. When people believe they are failures or that their failures (evil sowing) forever ruin their chances for success and marks them for life, it neutralizes them and wipes out their ability to use their life and the gifts God has given them.

But how do we avoid this? By the following:

By confessing our failures to God (1Jn 1:9; Ps 32:5-[note](#)). This wipes the slate clean.

By knowing and resting in the fact we are forgiven through Christ and can move ahead for the Lord and in life regardless of the past (Ps 32:1-8-[note](#); Ps 51:1-13-[note](#)).

By learning from our failures: use them as back doors to success (Ps 119:59, 67, 71-[note](#)). The principle is we need to learn from our failures (He 5:8-note).

By forgetting the past (triumphs and failures) so we can press on for the future with renewed commitment to God's will (Php 3:13,14; Lk 9:62).

By seeing and using the trials caused by our failures as character builders. "The tests of life are to make, not break us. Trouble may demolish a man's business but build up his character. The blow at the outward man may be the greatest blessing to the inner man."<sup>10</sup> Again consider Ps. 119:67-[note](#), Ps 119:71-[note](#) with Jas 1:2-note, Jas 1:3, 4-note; 1Pe 1:6, 7-note.

As **Lawrence** mentioned (see his book [John Lawrence, Life's Choices, Multnomah Press, Portland, 1982, pp. 22-23](#)), brooding

and wallowing in self-pity for having wasted some part of one's life will only cause us to fail to produce anything glorifying to the Lord in the year ahead.

Therefore: We Must Commit Ourselves to This Year's Harvest. We must press on in our lives by sowing for the future and for the Lord. Whether we did or did not produce effectively in last year's harvest, we must neither sit around in self-pity or guilt, or sit on our laurels. We must press on toward the upward call of God in Christ. The following passages illustrate what we need to do by way of pressing on whether we have experienced victory and growth, or failure, or a lack of growth. ([The Seven Laws of the Harvest- Recommended Read](#))

**Steven Cole** says that in regard to our attitude toward **past** events, sins, failures, etc, we should just "Leave them where they are "In the past." Pastor Cole notes that

the picture is of a runner who does not make the mistake of looking over his shoulder. His eyes are fixed on the goal. If he made mistakes earlier in the race, he doesn't kick himself by replaying them in his mind. If he did well, he doesn't gloat about it. He leaves the past behind and keeps moving on toward the finish line.

Many Christians today are being told that to experience healing from their difficult pasts, they need to delve into their pasts and relive the hurtful things that happened to them. This approach has come into the church from the world, not from the Word. It would be wrong to say that verse 13 is all that the Bible says about the past. Even earlier in the chapter, Paul has mentioned his own past life in Judaism.

It can be helpful to reflect on what happened to us in the past in order to understand where we're at in the present and where we need to grow. There is a biblical case for self examination, which means evaluating things that have happened in the past, both good and bad, as a means of growing now. But our text shows that there needs to be a balance. Paul means here that we should not be controlled by the past. Someone has used the analogy of a car's rear view mirror. You don't drive by looking in the mirror. You drive by looking ahead out of the windshield. But it's helpful to take occasional glances in your mirror and use the information to make decisions about how to drive safely in the present and future. But if you spend too much time looking in your mirror, you'll probably crash because you're not paying attention to the present. In the same way, we need to take periodic glances backward, but we also need to put the past (good and bad) behind us, accept God's grace and enabling for the present, and move on with what He is calling us to do now. ([Philippians 3:12-16 Christian Growth Process](#))

**Theodore Epp** writes the following advice on **Dealing With Your Past...**

We can do nothing about the past except make necessary confession. And when confession is made, the Bible promises: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

By confession, sin is placed under the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and when it is under the blood, it does not condemn any longer.

Unless the past is dealt with, one is not prepared to live in the present nor to go on into the future. Unless the past is dealt with, it becomes a haunting memory that saps the strength of the believer so he is unable to honor Christ in his daily life.

What God does with sin when it is confessed is explained in various passages. **Isaiah 44:22** says,

I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud, and your sins like a heavy mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you (NASB).

**Hebrews 8:12** (note) says

FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE" (NASB)

Someone has said,

The present must forget the past by correction, or else the past will become a moral and spiritual liability for the future.

Consider some items that need to be forgotten: failures--they keep our faith from advancing; successes--they create pride (see Pr 16:18); losses--they drag us down so we cannot serve the Lord the way we should; grievances--they produce false attitudes (see 1Cor 13:6); sorrows--God can heal all heartaches; discouragements--we need to remember Christ, not disappointments, thwarted hopes and plans.

And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (He 10:17-note) ([Back to the Bible](#)) ([Copyright Back to the Bible. Used by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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**Seeing Or Remembering** - There's a story about a man who was slowly losing his memory. After an examination, the doctor said that an operation on his brain might reverse his condition and restore his memory. However, the surgery would be so delicate that a nerve might be severed, causing total blindness.

"What would you rather have," asked the surgeon, "your sight or your memory?"

The man pondered the question for a few moments and then replied,

"My sight, because I would rather see where I am going than remember where I have been."

In Philippians 3 the apostle Paul made the same choice spiritually. His past, with its success and its shame, he chose to forget. What mattered to him most was keeping his eyes on the goal of gaining Christ's approval. That kind of mindset is one sure mark of Christian maturity. It's what God is working to develop in our lives (Phil. 3:13-15). We can't forget our past, of course, but we don't have to live in it. Any good we may have done is from God, so we can only be thankful. When we confess our sins, they are buried in the deepest sea. Let's not keep dredging them up.

What do you choose? To see or to remember? --D J De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Onward and upward your course plan today,  
Seeking new heights as you walk Jesus' way;  
Heed not past failures, but strive for the prize,  
Aiming for goals fit for His holy eyes. --Brandt

**If you keep looking back,  
you can't make spiritual progress.**

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**A Time To Forget** - The end of one year and the dawning of a new one provides an excellent opportunity to wipe the slate clean and make a fresh start. The well-known preacher Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) said: "We have passed through one more year. One more long stage in the journey of life, with its ascents and descents and dust and mud and rocks and thorns and burdens that wear the shoulders, is done. The old year is dead. Roll it away. Let it go. God, in His providence, has brought us out of it. It is gone; ... its evil is gone; its good remains. The evil has perished, and the good survives."

Those who know the Lord Jesus as their Savior can let go of the past and move ahead with assurance because Jesus provides forgiveness and hope. Having confessed their sin, "forgetting those things which are behind," they can confidently face the future, "reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Phil. 3:13). Remembering God's faithfulness and forgetting past mistakes will make entering the new year a time of joyous anticipation.

Yes, we can leave the sins and failures of this past year behind us, accept His forgiveness, and press on to higher ground. As far as our shortcomings are concerned, we can make the beginning of the new year a time to forget. — Richard De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Look not back on yesterday  
So full of failure and regret;  
Look ahead and seek God's way—  
All sin confessed you must forget. —DJD

**Never let a dark past cloud a bright future.**

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**Look Back Or Ahead?** - The great American baseball player Satchel Paige once said in jest, "Don't look back—something may be gaining on you." In contrast, George Santayana, a Spanish thinker and writer, noted in 1905, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

So which is it? Do we move on, never looking back, or do we dwell on our past errors to avoid making them again?

Scripture seems to indicate that we should do a little of both. We do need to think back on our lives and learn from our mistakes. That's part of the process when we confess our sins and ask God for forgiveness. We need to think about our disobedience long enough to seek God's mercy and then choose to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). Forgiveness is God's way of clearing the slate, but it's our responsibility to depend on the strength of the Holy Spirit who lives within us to avoid repeating the errors of the past. The



apostle Paul, for example, acknowledged his past mistakes, drew upon God's mercy, and then focused on becoming more like Christ (Philippians 3:13,14).

So, is it best for us to look back or to look ahead? We would be wise to do a little of both: We need to look back for forgiveness, then look ahead to make progress. — Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

More like the Master I would live and grow,  
More of His love to others I would show;  
More self-denial like His in Galilee,  
More like the Master I long to ever be. —Gabriel

**To grow spiritually, face up to your failures,  
then focus on Christ for the future.**

#### AND REACHING FORWARD: τοῖς δε ἐμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινομένοις (PMPMSN):

- Php 2:12 - note; Ro 15:23-29 - note; 1Co 9:24, 25, 26, 27 - note; Heb 12:1,2 - note
- Click John MacArthur's exposition [Reaching for the Prize](#)
- [Philippians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Reaching forward** (1901) (**ἐπεκτεῖνο** from **ἐπι** = into, upon + **εκτεῖνο** = to extend, stretch out <> **εκ** = out + **τεῖνο** = to stretch) means literally to overextend oneself. **Επεκτεῖνο** found only here in all of Scripture means to stretch one's muscles to their limit, attempting energetically to attain a state or condition. This verb was used to describe a runner who stretches out his neck and whose "eye outstrips and draws onward the hand, and the hand the foot." (Wuest)

**Eadie** notes that **ἐπεκτεῖνο** present a vivid image of "the keen attitude of the racer stretching his body out =**εκ** and toward **ἐπι** = the goal. ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

The **present tense** describes this "overextending" as Paul's habitual practice and calls for this to also be our lifelong attitude. The apostle is in a race and he is sparing nothing. Every fiber of his body, every bit of strength that he can draw from a breath of air is being put into the pursuit of a goal.

**Expositor's Bible Commentary** describes this as "the relentless centering of his energies and interests on the course that is ahead of him. ([Gaebelein, F. Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan Publishing](#))

The picture is of a foot race, in which the runner's head, shoulders and chest are bent forward and his eye fixed upon the goal, the tape at the end of the race so as to be the first one across the goal. Often a race is decided by a fraction of an inch, and the runner who is able to throw himself across the finish line by extending himself may be crowned the victor.

Paul is calling for an extreme effort, stretching one's self to the limit.

How are you doing? Do you have the focused attention that Paul is describing in your spiritual race? Or to ask it another way - What is your primary focus in life? What drives you? Where do you invest your time and energy and talent?

#### See related expositions...

- Running with endurance the race set before us (Hebrews 12:1)
- Fixing our eyes steadfastly on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2)

**Alexander Maclaren** explains Paul's figure of "reaching forward", writing that...

The idea is that of a man stretching himself out towards something as a runner does, with his body straining forward, the hand and the eye drawn onward towards the goal. He does not think of the furlongs that he has passed, he heeds not the nature of the ground over which he runs. The sharp stones in the path do not stay him, nor the flowerets in the grass catch his glance. The white faces of the crowd around the course are seen as in a flash as he rushes past them to the winning post, and the parsley garland that hangs there is all that he is conscious of. "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." Let us, with eye and hand flung forward, "stretch out towards the things that are before," and imitate that example — not in the fierce whirl

of excitement, indeed, but in fixed regard to, and concentrated desire of, the mark and the prize.

**Spurgeon** asks in regard to **reaching forward**...

Does he not here give us the picture of a runner? He reaches forth. The man, as he speeds, throws himself forward, almost out of the perpendicular. His eye is at the goal already. His hand is far in advance of his feet, the whole body is leaning forward; he runs as though he would project himself to the end of the journey before his legs can carry him there. That is how the Christian should be; always throwing himself forward after something more than he has yet reached, not satisfied with the rate at which he advances, his soul always going at twenty times the pace of the flesh. John Bunyan gives us a little parable of the man on horseback. He is bidden by his master to ride in a hurry to fetch the physician. But the horse is a sorry jade. "Well," saith Bunyan, "but if his master sees that the man on the horse's back is whipping and spurring, and pulling the bridle, and struggling with all his might, he judges that the man would go if he could." That is how the Christian should always be, not only as devout, earnest, and useful as he can be, but panting to be a great deal more so, spurring this old flesh and striving against this laggard spirit if perchance he can do more. Brethren, we ought to be reaching forward to be like Jesus. Never may we say, "I am like so-and-so, and that is enough." Am I like Jesus, perfectly like Jesus? If not, away, away, away from everything I am or have been; I cannot rest until I am like my Lord. The aim of the Christian is to be perfect: if he seeks to be anything less than perfect, he aims at an object lower than that which God has placed before him. To master every sin, and to have and possess and exhibit every virtue, - this is the Christian's ambition. He who would be a great artist must not follow low models. The artist must have a perfect model to copy; if he does not reach to it, he will reach far further than if he had an inferior model to work by. When a man once realises his own ideal, it is all over with him. A great painter once had finished a picture, and he said to his wife with tears in his eyes, "It is all over with me, I shall never paint again, I am a ruined man." She enquired, "Why?" "Because," he says, "that painting contents and satisfies me; it realises my idea of what painting ought to be, and therefore I am sure my power is gone, for that power lies in having ideals which I cannot reach, something yet beyond me which I am striving after." May none of us ever say, "I have reached my ideal, now I am what I ought to be, there is nothing beyond me." Perfection, brethren, absolute perfection, may God help us to strive after it! That is the model, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." "Shall we ever reach it?" says one. Thousands and millions have reached it, there they are before the throne of God, their robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb, and we shall possess the same, only let us be struggling after it by God's good help. Let every believer be striving, that in the details of common life, in every thought, in every word, in every action, he may glorify God. This ought to be our object; if we do not reach it, it is that which we must press for, - that from morning light to evening shade we shall live unto God. Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is what we are to seek after, praying always in the Holy Ghost to be sanctified wholly, spirit, soul, and body. "It is a wonderfully high standard," says one. Would you like me to lower it, brother? I should be very sorry to have it lowered for myself. If the highest degree of holiness were denied to any one of us, it would be a heavy calamity. Is it not the joy of a Christian to be perfectly like his Lord? Who would wish to stop short of it? To be obliged to live under the power of even the least sin for ever, would be a horrible thing! No, we never can be content short of perfection; we will reach forward towards that which is before. ([Philippians 3:13,14 Onward!](#))

**Dwight Pentecost** tells the following story illustrating the picture Paul is painting for us...

When I was in London, I found my way to several of the art museums and galleries of that city. I wanted to see some of the famous paintings I had become familiar with through books of art. It was a delightful experience to walk through those corridors. I was particularly struck with one painting. Two chariots were racing at breakneck speed. Their wheels were just a blur of motion. The charioteers, with whip in hand, were lashing their horses to the expenditure of every ounce of energy they had. Intensity was written in their eyes, in their faces, in the set of their bodies. The horses were straining themselves, it seemed, to the point of collapse. Their eyes wild, their nostrils distended, they gulped great breaths of air as they pressed toward the goal. With the goal before them, they were giving themselves unreservedly to the race. Those who had not so extended themselves had been left behind and were an insignificant part of the background of the painting. The attention of the viewer was focused upon the two charioteers who strained toward the goal. (Pentecost, J. D. *The Joy of living: A study of Philippians*. Page 144. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications)

**Adam Clarke** has an interesting quote...

When it was said to Diogenes, the cynic, "Thou art now an old man, rest from thy labours;" to this he answered: "If I have run long in the race, will it become me to slacken my pace when come near the end;

should I not rather stretch forward?" Diog. Laert., lib. vi. cap. 2. sec. 6.

**Stephen Olford** writes...

Most people are afraid of the future. Uncertainty and insecurity about the days that lie ahead fill the heart with fear and foreboding. But for the Christian, there need be no fear. In the language of the old hymn, he can say with Edward H. Bickersteth:

**Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?  
Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.**

[\(Play Hymn\)](#)

There is nothing that can ever happen which is not already foreknown and included within the permissive will of God. There is a sense that through trust in the living God we can foresee the things which are before us. The eventualities of life need neither terrify nor disturb us. (Olford, S. F. (2002). Vol. 2: Institutes of Biblical preaching: Volume two)

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This devotional illustrates the importance of not looking back but instead continually looking forward - [Winning the Race](#) - On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister became the first man in history to run a mile in less than 4 minutes. Within 2 months, John Landy eclipsed the record by 1.4 seconds. On August 7, 1954, the two met together for a historic race. As they moved into the last lap, Landy held the lead. It looked as if he would win, but as he neared the finish he was haunted by the question, "Where is Bannister?" As he turned to look, Bannister took the lead. Landy later told a Time magazine reporter, "If I hadn't looked back, I would have won!"

One of the most descriptive pictures of the Christian life in the Bible is of an athlete competing in a race. 1Cor 9:24-27 (note) tells us that discipline is the key to winning. In Heb 12:1, 2 (notes - 12:1, 12:2) we are encouraged to lay aside anything that might hinder our spiritual advancement and to stay focused on Christ. And in Philippians 3:12, 13, the apostle Paul said,

"I press on... forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead."

Lord, give us endurance as we run this race of life. Help us not to wallow in past failures, but to be disciplined and to shun sinful ways. May we fix our eyes on the eternal goal set before us and keep looking unto Jesus. -H G Bosch ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Run the straight race through God's good grace,  
Lift up thine eyes and seek His face;  
Life with its way before us lies,  
Christ is the path and Christ the prize. -Monsell

**You can't make spiritual progress  
by looking back.**

**TO WHAT LIES AHEAD: tois de emprosthen:**

- Click John MacArthur's exposition [Reaching for the Prize](#)
- [Philippians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

Literally "the things before"

**What lies ahead** ([1715](#)) (**tois... emprosthen** from **en** = in, + **prósthēn** = in front of, before) refers to the things that are before or in front of, or ahead of us.

In his painting "An Allegory of Prudence," the 16th-century Venetian artist Titian portrayed Prudence as a man with three heads. One head was of a youth facing the future, another of a mature man eyeing the present, and the third, a wise old man gazing at the past. Over their heads Titian wrote a Latin phrase that means,

"From the example of the past, the man of the present acts prudently so as not to imperil the future."

We need that kind of wisdom to overcome the anxiety created by our past failures and the fear of repeating them in the future--an anxiety that can keep us from enjoying life to the fullest right now. Paul was able to "forget" his past and anticipate his future. This doesn't mean that his memory was erased, but it does mean that because God had forgiven him, Paul had a clean conscience and

was free of any guilt or pride he may have felt from his past. As he lived in daily fellowship with Christ, trials became God's tools to gradually chisel him into conformity to Christ Jesus his Lord. Thus Paul's driving passion was to know Christ better. As we close the chapter of each year of our life, let's rededicate ourselves (not legalistically but under grace and in complete dependence on His Spirit) to follow Paul's example. The Spirit of Christ will enable us to live fully in the present as we gain wisdom from the past and face the future with courage. Refuse to let a bleak past cloud your bright future (see **notes** regarding exulting in our hope and in tribulations in Ro 5:2, 3 (notes = Ro 5:2 ; 5:3))

**David Guzik** writes...

Because Paul realizes that he has not "arrived," there is only one option open for him. He must press on. There is no turning back for Him.

When Spain led the world (in the 15th century), their coins reflected their national arrogance and were inscribed Ne Plus Ultra which meant "Nothing Further" - meaning that Spain was the ultimate in all the world. After the discovery of the New World, they realized that they were not the "end of the world" - they changed the inscription on their coinage to Plus Ultra - meaning "More Beyond."

Which motto better expresses your Christian life - "Nothing Further" or "More Beyond"?

This is where child-like faith meets real maturity. A child can't wait to be bigger, and always wants to be more mature. Paul has put his hand to the plow and will not look back (Luke 9:62). ([Notes](#))

**Tozer** rightly observes that in the Christian life...

The normal Bible direction is not backward, it is always forward. Jacob returned to the altar, but in doing so he did not go back, he went forward. The Prodigal Son did not say, "I will go back"; he said, "I will arise and go to my father."

From where he was, going to his father's house was a forward step in his moral activities. It represented no retreat, but a distinct advance over his previous conduct.

The will of God is always the proper goal for every one of us. Where God is must be the place of desire. Any motion toward God is a forward motion. Even repentance is not a retreat toward the past but a decided march into a more glorious future. Restitution is not a return to yesterday but a step into a blessed tomorrow...

If we find that we have gone back, then we should immediately reverse the direction and again go forward. (The Next Chapter After the Last)

**C H Spurgeon** writes that...

Paul having put the past and present in their proper places goes on to the FUTURE, ASPIRING EAGERLY TO MAKE IT GLORIOUS. **We ought to be reaching forward, to be like Jesus. He who would be a great artist must not follow low models.** (see note Hebrews 12:2) "Be ye perfect." Shall we ever reach it. Millions have who are before the throne, and we shall too by God's good help.

PUTTING FORTH ALL HIS EXERTIONS TO REACH THAT WHICH HE DESIRES.

1. "This one thing I do." He might have attempted other things, and did, but all with reference to this one purpose.
2. Why? Because he felt God had called him to it.
3. Moreover he saw the crown.

**Alexander Maclaren** writes...

**I. First, we may take this as the advice commended to us in the example here taught us: Live in the future.**

Our highest condition in this world is not the attainment of perfection, but the recognition of heights above us which are as yet unreached. From generation to generation, for the individual and the species, the condition of our progress is a distance beckoning us, and a feeling that we have not already attained, neither are already perfect.

**II. Let the bright, certain, infinite future dwarf for us the narrow and stained past: "forgetting the things that are behind."**

- (1) Forget past failures; they are apt to weaken you.

(2) Be sure to forget past attainments; they are apt to become food for complacency, for every vain confidence.

(3) Forget your past circumstances, whether they be sorrows or joys; the one are not without remedy, the other not perfect. "Forget the things that are behind."

### **III. Let hopes for the future and lessons from the past alike lead to strenuous work in the present.**

"This one thing I do." Be the past what it may, be the future what it may, I know that I cannot reach the one nor forget the other, except by setting myself with all my might and main to present duties, and by reducing all duties to various forms of one great life-purpose. Concentration of all our strength on a single aim, and that aim pursued through all our days, with their varying occupations—what a grand ideal of life that is! We shall work hard and heartily at various tasks, and yet the good part shall not be taken away from us by outward activity, any more than our possession of it will sequester us from vigorous service of God and man. (Living in the Future)

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**What Is My Purpose?** - In Daniel Schaeffer's book on Esther, *Dancing With A Shadow*, he summarizes with a single sentence the lives of each of the main characters in that wonderful Old Testament book. For Ahasuerus, the powerful warrior king of Persia, it was: "Success in life is all in the planning." For the faithful Mordecai: "The price of obedience is never too high." And for Queen Esther: "What I am is more important than what I have." She proved it when she risked her crown (and life) to intercede with Ahasuerus on her people's behalf.

I was discussing these one-line descriptions with some co-workers who were also reading Schaeffer's book. Someone wondered how we might summarize in a single statement our purpose for living. One woman candidly admitted, "My only goal in life is to catch up." Sound familiar? For others it might be, "To have as little trouble in life as I can." Or you may say with Haman, "You can never have too much."

But as followers of Jesus Christ, we should be able to say with the apostle Paul,

"One thing I do, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Php 3:13-14).

Is that the purpose of your life? --D C Egnor ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Do you pursue a life of wealth and fame?  
A mocking epitaph is all you'll claim;  
Let God replace your vain and selfish aim  
With lasting goals that glorify His name. --Gustafson

**We fulfill our purpose  
when we serve our Creator**

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In his devotional "**Our Daily Walk**" **F B Meyer** has this devotional on Philipians 3:13-14, entitled "**The Christian Ideal**":

AN IDEAL is a mental conception of character after which we desire to shape our lives. It is the fresco which we paint on the walls of our soul, and perpetually look at in our lonely hours; and since the heart is educated through the eye, we become more and more assimilated to that which we admire.

Our Ideal should be distinctly beyond us. We must be prepared to strain our muscles and task our strength, attempting something which those who know us best never thought us capable of achieving. Like St. Paul, we must count the ordinary ambitions of men as dung, must forget the things which are behind and press forward to those before.

We should choose as an objective some ideal which is manifestly, in our own judgment or that of others, within our scope. It is a mistake to set before our minds an ideal which is altogether out of harmony with the make-up of our nature. Therefore we should learn, to say with the Apostle: "I follow on to apprehend that for which I was apprehended by Christ Jesus." Be sure that God created and redeemed you for a definite purpose. Discover that purpose, and set yourself to make it good.

Our Ideal should give unity to life. Happy is the man who is able to prosecute his ideal through each hour of consciousness, and who can say: "This one thing I do!" Such people are the irresistible ones. Those who know

one subject thoroughly, or who bend all their energies in the prosecution of one purpose, carry all before them. The quest for a holy character may be prosecuted always and everywhere. In every act and thought we may become more like Christ.

The Christ ideal is the highest ideal. "That I may gain Christ, and be found in Him." But such an ideal will only be realised at the cost of self-denial. You must put aside your own righteousness to get His; you must be willing to count all things loss; you must ignore the imperious demands of passion. So shall you be prepared for the hour when even "the body of your humiliation" shall be transformed to the likeness of the glorious body of Christ. His working is on your side; in you and for you He will subdue all things to Himself.

PRAYER - Thou, O Christ, art all I want. May Thy grace abound towards me, so that having all sufficiency in all things, I may abound unto every good work. AMEN.