

## PRESS ON IN YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE

*3<sup>12</sup>[It is] not that I have already obtained this or have already been made perfect; rather, I press on so that I may take hold of that for which also I have been taken hold of by Christ. <sup>13</sup>Brothers, I do not regard myself as having [already] taken hold of [these things]; rather, I do this one thing: forgetting the things that are behind and reaching for the things that lie ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on to the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>15</sup>All of us who are mature should have this attitude; and if you have any different attitude, God will certainly reveal that to you; <sup>16</sup>only let us live in agreement with the level of maturity we have attained.*

*<sup>17</sup>Join in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who are walking in accordance with the model you have in us. <sup>18</sup>As I have often told you, and even now tell you with tears, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup>Their destiny is perdition, their god is their own appetites\*, and they glory in their shameful conduct. They set their minds on earthly things. <sup>20</sup>[But] our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup>By the power that enables him to bring everything into submission to himself, he will transform the body belonging to the present state of our humiliation, so that it may be conformed to his glorified body. (Phil. 3:12-21)*

\*Literally, “*their god is the belly*”

### **Introduction**

What was all-time home run king Hank Aaron’s advice to baseball slugger, Cecil Fielder, or any other slugger who would seek to break the home run record? Hank says,

The only thing I could tell him is to stay focused ... He has to stay focused on what he has to do. A lot of players—not only ballplayers, but also football players and basketball players—live off what happened last week. A lot of players hit three home runs and say, “Hey, I could live off of this for two or three weeks.” (*USA Weekend Magazine*, June 28-30, 1996, pp.4-6)

Hank Aaron’s advice to home run sluggers: If you want to be successful, if you want to break records, stay focused and don’t live off of the past—keep pressing on. Stay focused and keep pressing on, that is the same formula the Apostle Paul gives for successful Christian living.

Rather than becoming complacent, we are required to press on in our Christian life. Because we have not yet attained unto full spiritual maturity, let us be diligent to press on in our Christian life in accordance with the admonition we find here in Philippians chapter three.

## I. Press On in Your Christian Life, ...Towards the Goal (vs. 12-16)

The Apostle Paul testifies that he presses on in his Christian life *"to the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (vs. 14.) *"The prize"* is defined as *"the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,"* compare 1 Peter 5:10, *"[God] has called you to His eternal glory in Christ."* God's *"eternal glory"* is His majestic splendor and blessedness. A glimpse of Christ's eternal glory was revealed to the disciples at the time of our Lord's transfiguration: *"After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup>There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light"* (Matt. 17:1-2.) Referring to this incident, Luke declares, *"Now Peter and they who were with him ... saw his glory"* (Lk. 9:32.)

Paul presses on toward the goal because he has not yet arrived. Scripture defines the Christian life as being a dynamic, progressive experience with Christ, note 2 Corinthians 3:18, *"we ... beholding ... the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from [one degree of] glory to [a greater degree of] glory."* Scripture portrays the Christian life as a race to be run or a journey to be completed: *"let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. <sup>2</sup>Let us focus our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith"* (Heb. 12:1-2.) Consider the Apostle Paul's testimony to young Timothy: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"* (2 Tim. 4:7.) Conversion and public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not the culmination of the Christian experience, it is the beginning; it is the entrance into the Christian life, it is the embarking on the Christian journey. By way of illustration, public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is like gaining entrance to the freeway that leads to the Paradise of God, it is not the culmination of the journey.

Paul presses on toward the goal because he has been claimed by Christ. Verse 12 *"I press on so that I may take hold of that for which also I have been taken hold of by Christ,"* may be translated: *"I press on so that I may claim the prize, **because** I have been claimed by Christ Jesus."* It is Paul's relationship to Christ and the salvation Christ provides that is the incentive and the power for developing the Christian life and pursuing the goal; note 1 John 3:2-3, *"Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup>Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure"* (1 Jn. 3:2-3.) Again, by way of illustration: If you possess a winning lottery ticket, that gives you the incentive to protect that ticket and cash it in—the certainty of its value and your claim to it creates the incentive and diligence.

Paul presses on toward the goal with a great sense of urgency. There is strenuous exertion: *"I press on,"* like an Olympic runner going for the gold medal. There is single-minded exertion: *"I do this one thing: forgetting the things that are behind and reaching for the things that lie ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on to the goal."* It should be

noted that *"the things which are behind"* is a reference to his triumphs and progress in the Christian life, not a reference to his failures. Bear in mind Hank Aaron's comment: "The only thing I could tell him is to stay focused. ... He has to stay focused on what he has to do. A lot of players—not only ballplayers, but football players and basketball players—live off what happened last week. A lot of players hit three home runs and say, 'Hey, I could live off of this for two or three weeks.'" Note, too, that in Paul's pressing on toward the goal there is critical (necessary) exertion: *"I press on so that I may take hold of [or, claim] the prize;"* Hebrews 12:14 exhorts the Christian: *"Follow after [or, pursue] peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord."* Living out the Christian life is not an "extra curricular activity" for super Christians, it is mandatory for anyone who would inherit the kingdom of heaven.

The Apostle Paul presses on toward the goal and he declares that we must do the same: *"All of us who are mature should have this attitude"* (vs. 15a.) All of us, like the Apostle Paul, must exhibit the same focus and commitment to developing the Christian life. Paul goes on to write, *"if you have any different attitude, God will certainly reveal that to you"* (vs. 15b.) That is to say, if some part of your life is "off track" and not in accordance with God's purpose, God will let you know about it, and He usually does so by means of the gracious convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Referring to the Holy Spirit and His ministry, the LORD declares through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, *"when you turn aside to the right or to the left, with your ears you will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way, walk in it'"* (Isa. 30:21.) The Lord Jesus declares, *"As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline"* (Rev. 3:19.)

Paul exhorts us, *"let us live in agreement with the level of maturity we have attained"* (vs. 16.) Let us maintain the degree of spiritual maturity we have attained, let us not slip back from that level. On the contrary, let us strive to advance yet further and attain an even greater degree of spiritual maturity; we are to stay focused and continue to press on towards the goal.

## **II. Press On in Your Christian Life, ...Don't Be Like the Enemies of the Cross (vs. 17-19)**

In verse 17 the apostle urges us to actively imitate his conduct and take special note of those people who are doing so in their lives: *"Join in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who are walking in accordance with the model you have in us."* Note that it is not the "successful," nor the influential, nor the wealthy; rather, it is the devout who are singled out for consideration and imitation.

Vibrant, sincere, devout Christians are to be singled out for consideration and imitation as role models because there are so many other people whose lifestyle identifies them as *"enemies of the cross of Christ"* (vs. 18.) By their conduct, these people demonstrate that they and their lives are directly opposed to and in active opposition against the whole purpose of the cross of Christ. They

demonstrate themselves to be "*enemies of the cross of Christ,*" in contrast to the confession, the attitude and the lifestyle that is the characteristic of the true Christian: "*far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world*" (Gal. 6:14.) Paul's testimony is the testimony of every true Christian. Note, too, the admonition of the Apostle James: "*You adulterous people, do you not realize that friendship with the world is enmity against God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*" (Jas. 4:4.)

Who are these people of whom the apostle writes and whom he identifies as "*enemies of the cross of Christ*"? The fact that he contrasts them with devout Christian people and that he weeps over them, seems to indicate that they were present within the church. Scripture teaches that there are people who understand the dynamics of grace, but fail to comprehend and appreciate the purpose of grace. That is to say, they understand that by the grace of God the cross of Christ has provided the means of forgiveness for sins; but they fail to comprehend that the cross of Christ at the same time provides the means of salvation from sin: "*What shall we say, then? Shall we continue sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup>God forbid. We died to sin; how can we live for it any longer? <sup>3</sup>Do you not realize that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*" (Rom. 6:1-3.)

Paul provides the following character sketch of these whom he identifies as "enemies of the cross of Christ." He tells us, their "*god is their own appetites,*" (literally, "*their god is their belly.*") These people are dedicated to serving their own appetites, satisfying the lusts and desires of their sinful nature, (especially as those desires manifest themselves in physical, fleshly passions,) rather than serving Christ. They "*glory in their shameful conduct.*" Those things God defines as shameful (vulgar speech and humor, deceit, immorality, etc.), they practice with confidence and even brashness. They are the same as those described by the LORD through the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah: "*Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them, declares Jehovah*" (Jer. 6:15.) They "*set their minds on earthly things.*" Their outlook and their concerns are like the people of this world, oriented on this present life, not focused on the kingdom of God with a transcendent perspective. Their attitude and perspective is totally contrary to that which the Christians is exhorted to exhibit: "*So do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or, 'What will we drink?' or, 'What will we wear?'*" <sup>32</sup>*The [unbelieving] Gentiles are preoccupied with all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup>But seek first his kingdom and its righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*" (Matt. 6:31-33.) The Apostle Paul concludes his discussion of such persons by declaring, their "*destiny is perdition.*" This is in accord with the warning issued by the Lord Jesus Himself:

*Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" <sup>23</sup>Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers!" (Matt. 7:21-23)*

In his Epistle to the Galatians, Paul issued a similar warning:

*Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked: whatever a man sows, he will also reap: <sup>8</sup>the man who sows to please his sinful nature, shall reap destruction from the sinful nature; but the man who sows to please the Spirit, shall reap eternal life from the Spirit. (Gal. 6:7-8)*

### **III. Press On in Your Christian Life, ...Because You Hold Citizenship in the Kingdom of God (vs. 20)**

We are to carefully consider and imitate the godly life when we see it displayed in others (vs. 17,) because as believers in Christ, we hold citizenship in the kingdom of God (vs. 20.) In other words, those who, like the Apostle Paul, live devout God-centered lives are showing us how we are to conduct ourselves as citizens of God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven.

The force of the apostle's words in verse 20a is this: "you **presently** hold citizenship in the kingdom of God." From the moment we believe in Christ we become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, as Paul assured the Gentile believers who were a part of the church in Ephesus, "*you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the family of God*" (Eph. 2:19.) Indeed, from the moment we believe in Christ we become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, with all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Scripture not only identifies the Christian as a pilgrim journeying to the kingdom of God, it also identifies him as presently being a member of a colony of heaven existing in this world. By way of illustration: The citizens of West Berlin were under the laws of West Germany, even though the city of Berlin was located in East German territory. As people who presently hold citizenship in the kingdom of God, we are obligated to conduct our lives in compliance with the laws of that heavenly kingdom even though we are living in this world.

We are to stay focused and press on in our Christian life, because we hold citizenship in the kingdom of God, and thus are obligated to live by its divine standards, as opposed to the standards that are accepted by the world.

### **Conclusion**

"Stay focused and press on!" That's the advice home run king Hank Aaron has for home run hitters who aspire to surpass previous sluggers and get their names in the record book.

"Stay focused and press on!" That's the command the Apostle Paul presents to us for successful Christian living, the kind that pleases God, is consistent with our divine calling, and obtains the final inheritance in glory.