

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc dantrygg@msn.com Today's Date: August 10, 2008

Pressing On After God's Purpose

by Dan Trygg

"Not that I have already grasped *these things* or have already been *fully* completed, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself to have laid hold of *it*; but one thing *I do*: on the one hand, overlooking the things behind, but on the other hand stretching forward to the things ahead, ¹⁴ I press on according to the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore, as many as are mature, may we think *this way*; and if y'all think any other way, also God will reveal this to you..."
Philippians 3:12-16

Whenever the scriptures speak about maturity, I pay attention. Passages like these give me an idea of what God is trying to do in my life, and what He expects of me. Someday I will be accountable to Him for what I did in my life. He will measure me by these expectations, and how I chose to align myself with His purposes for my life, ...or whether I chose to disregard Him. Here, in Philippians 3, we have a glimpse into the heart and mind of the apostle Paul, as he shares with us what motivated him. He believes this to be the heart and mindset of every believer who would become mature. As he lays this out for us, there are some significant insights for us along the way, ...truths that indicate not only God's purpose, but also reveal some practical principles for success in our spiritual journey.

Paul is writing this letter to one of his favorite churches, the church at Philippi. This group was special to him, partly because God had specifically called him to come there to minister. He and his fellow workers were in Asia at the time (modern day Turkey), having revisited the churches he had pioneered on his first missionary journey. They were at Troas, on the seacoast at the NW corner of Asia, and they were at a loss as to what to do next. They tried going in a couple of different directions, but God was not opening any opportunities for them. Then Paul received a vision in the night. A man from Macedonia appeared to him, appealing for him to come there and help them. As he shared his vision with the others, they concluded that God was indicating that they should cross over the Aegean Sea to the west and go to Macedonia. They went to Philippi, a Roman colony and one of the leading cities of that area. **It was the gateway into Europe, ...strategically set at the eastern end of the Egnatian Way, a major road that led westward to Rome**, the main overland route from Asia. Unlike most of the cities Paul evangelized, Philippi did not have a synagogue. He found a small group of women gathered outside the city by the riverside on the Sabbath to pray. As he shared the gospel, the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, a business woman from Asia. She and her household were baptized, and she invited Paul's group to stay at her house. His ministry was aborted by an episode with a demoniac, which landed him in jail. God turned the attack of the enemy around, however, and brought the Philippian jailer and his family to faith (Acts 16). Although Paul had to leave, the church continued to grow and prosper. **In the ten or more years that passed since his initial visit, they kept in touch with him, and continued to support his ministry work. This thoughtful service continued even during his imprisonment** (Phil. 2:25-30).

The imprisonment Paul is writing about probably coincided with the house arrest of the last chapters of Acts. The word translated as "imprisonment" in the NASB is actually "bonds" (1:7,13,14), more accurately describing his situation at the end of that book. He was waiting for trial before the emperor, Nero, who had not yet come out strongly against Christians. The very real possibility of death was mentioned in the first chapter, which legally could only be carried out at the emperor's decision (1:20; Acts 25:11,12). He mentions how his circumstances had given him the opportunity to proclaim and defend the gospel, so that even the praetorian guard and members of Caesar's household (1:13; 4:22) were well aware of him. In the immediate context of chapter 3 **Paul warned of false teachers, especially those of Jewish background, who claimed special authority based upon their background.** Paul recounts his own background as being even more impressive than theirs, but then states that such credentials meant nothing as far as knowing God personally. In fact, confidence in such outward things can actually *block* one's receptiveness to the things of God (cf. I Cor. 1:20-31). **Paul had to give up all that, and count it as nothing, so that he might stand before God in Christ's righteousness, rather than his own.** He had to renounce a righteousness of his own, based upon keeping the law, in order to gain Christ, and the righteousness of God which comes by faith to those who trust in Him. **He had put aside everything else in order that he might come to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.**

Just as Jesus had freely given up all privilege and emptied Himself to become a humble and obedient servant, being willing to even die on the cross (2:3-11),
in the same way Paul was willing to embrace humility and share in Christ's sufferings, even to be joined with Him in a death like His (3:8-10).

It is at this point that we come to the verses under consideration for today's study:

In verse 12, the apostle recognizes that **there is still room to grow, and he is determined to keep pushing forward into that growth.** He had been following Jesus for about 25 years by this time, and had accomplished much for the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, he was still aware of areas where he had not fully tapped into all that God had for him to experience, to become and to do. **Note especially the sense of purpose. God had "laid hold of" him for some particular reason, and he was determined to "press on" to discover and accomplish all that He intended.** It is interesting to note in chapter 1, how Paul was torn between wanting to go to be with Christ, or to stay here and serve. He could clearly see, however, that he was needed for the sake of the saints who were still dependent upon him (1:21-26). Seven years later, however, in II Timothy 4:6-8,17, it is quite evident that he sensed that he *had accomplished* what God had intended for him to do, and it was time to come home. **God has "laid hold of" you for a special purpose. Are you rising to that challenge? Are you preparing yourself for the mission He has recruited you for, ...pushing on, pressing through, and overcoming whatever resistance or obstacles may be set against you?** This is the *mindset*, the determination and preoccupation, of the mature in Christ: How can I come to know, experience and fulfill all that God has in mind for me?

Verses 13 and 14 offer some very important practical insights for those of us who want to move forward in Christ. There are three parts to this that the apostle delineates, **...three very separate, but inter-related actions...**, **which are all required in order for us to discover and fulfill what God has for us.** Note that Paul describes these three aspects as "one thing". They go together. They cannot be separated in order to get the job done. This is part of the mature mindset which Paul is describing here. The three-in-one thing which Paul describes is

(1.) disregarding, over-looking, giving-no-heed-to; not-calling-to-mind the things of the past;
(2) reaching-out for, straining, stretching, extending-oneself, trying-hard-to-grasp the things ahead of us;
and (3.) pursuing, seeking, striving for, running after, following after with haste and intensity of effort.

The basic Greek sentence has point #3 as the main verb, "I pursue, press on", while the other verbal forms are participles that modify that verb. **You could translate it this way, "I press-on-with-haste-and-intensity-of-effort while, on the one hand disregarding-the-past-things, and while, on the other hand, stretching-out-to-reach-for the future things".**

What is Paul talking about? He is talking about letting go of the past, ...whether past accomplishments, credentials, self-identity, ...past failures and sins, past accusations, rejections, wounds, ...past habits, mistakes and defeats, and the messages that accompany them, ...in order to be able to move beyond these old experiences and messages and come into what God has for you in Christ. If you are believing old defeatist messages about yourself, or old attitudes of superiority, you won't be able to take the necessary risks to stretch out in new ways. If you let old wounds and offenses continue to pull you into fleshly resentments, you won't be able to move forward in the fruit of the Spirit. Note that while many of our English translations render the Greek word as "forgetting", a better translation would be to "overlook" or "disregard" those old experiences and messages. Don't call them to mind. **Instead, we ought to be stretching out, extending ourselves, reaching in new ways to get in touch with the workings of the Spirit. This implies both effort and risk.** It will feel uncomfortable, but we won't discover what is new, if we only stay within our old, comfortable ways.

Paul says that he presses on "according to the goal, mark or target" for the prize. This introduces again the notion of purpose and direction for our lives. **God has a target for us, something that He has in His heart for us. This has to do with our spiritual giftedness, and the calling which God has for us to accomplish. Paul was determined to live his life in order to accomplish this goal.** This is akin to Ephesians 2:10, where Paul says that we are God's workmanship, His finely-crafted implement, created for good works, which He has prepared for us to walk in. In I Cor. 9:24-27, Paul uses the image of athletes, who train to be the best at what they do. He says that he also disciplines himself, keeping his flesh under subjection, so that he can carry out his ministry effectively. **If we are going to "press on according to the target" then we must discipline ourselves to be able to minister effectively in the power of the Spirit according to our spiritual gifts. The life of maturity is a life of discipline. A life not without aim,** but deliberately designed to enable us to follow the leading of the Spirit.

Finally, Paul expects that anyone who would be mature would have such a deliberate, persevering mindset. He was also confident that if any of us did not, God will be working to reveal to us where we are not serious-minded enough. **God will reveal to us where we are lazy or living in contradiction to His purposes. Even then, however, we must choose to respond to His admonitions, for many will not, and will end up in disaster (cf. vs. 18).**