

Paul's Letter to the Philippians - Lesson 11

Philippians 3:12-17

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Bruce: Gracious heavenly Father, You are the reason it is well with our souls. And Father, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* May that be so today. And also, Father, would You open our eyes, that we might behold You more clearly for Christ's sake? And all the brothers said,

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Continuing our study in the book of Philippians, Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, I invite you to turn in your texts to Philippians chapter 3. We'll be examining verses 12-17. Philippians chapter 3, 12-17.

"Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are more mature think this way. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have obtained. Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen. One of the features of the inspired word of God that benefits me the most and that I appreciate the most is the way that the Holy Spirit has led the writers of the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, to teach us some wonderful principles. And that is this: that before he tells us what to do and how we should do it, he tells us why we ought to do it. In other words, doctrine precedes practice.

Doctrine means standard. The standard that God gives us comes before the practice of the application of that standard. And the same thing occurs here with the apostle Paul in our passage today. The standard that he gave us last week in verses 8-11 is how one would know that he could have acceptance before a holy God—justification through faith alone. We rely on Another's righteousness, the righteousness that is outside of ourselves, not in ourselves, not in the law, but in the Person and work of Christ.

And we remember this. The righteousness that comes from God is in Christ's righteousness. We get credit for Christ's righteousness. That's why we can stand before a holy God.

Next, we saw that it is not merited by works of men. Our righteousness is not merited by our works. It comes from God. It is appropriated by faith. It results in striving after spiritual perfection.

And then Paul gives us an indication of what he is looking to do next. And that was his ambition to get to know Christ more clearly. In our verses today, he's going to take us on what I call *a pathway to perfection*. Now I use the word *pathway* because it's a journey that never ends. As Paul is going to teach us, we don't ever reach that, but it is something we should never give up. And so it's a pathway to our perfection.

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So what I want us to understand is that Paul is going to teach us that his goal is to know Christ more clearly. And now he tells us how we do that. How do you and I get to know Christ more clearly and love Him more deeply and follow Him more significantly and obey Him more clearly? He's now going to give us some steps on how to do that. And this is his description of his ambition to get to know Christ more clearly.

Now in Paul's letters he uses many illustrations from the world to communicate truth about the Christian life. A couple of them would be these. He uses illustrations from the military. Such a phrase is "*Put on the whole armor of God.*"

He uses phrases from the architectural world. "*You are the temple of God.*" From architecture, "*Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.*" And from the athletic world, "*I press on.*"

So Paul uses illustrations from the world to describe activities of the Christian faith. He's now going to use the phraseology of the athlete. "I press on; I press forward." Paul is a perfectionist. But I also think that he was very much of a realist.

It seems that there were those people in Philippi who felt that they had reached the goal of Christian perfection and that they had arrived. And Paul needed to deal with that. So he describes for us what I call *a pathway to perfection*, a pathway which we need to follow so we can follow Christ more clearly.

Now these Judaizers in the church at Philippi who infiltrated the church were presenting a perverted gospel, a gospel that was teaching them that if you followed the law completely, you would attain spiritual perfection. So Paul is going to deal with the fallacy of that spiritual perfection technique.

Now Paul at the same time recognized the call for Christians to aspire to the highest level of activity. Jesus Himself said this. Now here is our standard, men. This is what Paul is going to teach us. "*Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" Matthew 5:48. He encourages the church to pursue such a standard. So that's the pathway that we need to pursue, spiritual perfection.

Remember, we get credit for the perfection of Christ. You and I are never perfect. We get credit for the sinless perfection and the perfect obedience of Christ. That's how we're justified by faith.

Go back to Philippians chapter 2 verse 15. It's something very similar: "*that you may be blameless and innocent.*" That's a description of our perfection. "*Blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.*"

Now being a realist as well as a perfectionist, Paul recognized that all believers should aspire to this highest calling, but he never claimed to reach it himself. He never claimed to have reached that perfection. Although he is encouraging us to strive after it, he reminds us that he never achieved it himself.

Paul was a goal setter. You can read it in the writings of his short-term goals to go to certain locations to preach the gospel. But in this section of the letter to the church at Philippi, Paul describes in detail a long-term plan to achieve his goal of loving Christ more clearly, a spiritual maturity that God had in mind for him.

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So he describes for us a pathway. This is how you become more mature and reach the maturity that God had in store for him, just as much as God has it in store for us. And so he describes a pathway.

The first thing is this. I think we need to have *a correct self-assessment of ourselves*. Look at verse 12. *“Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect.”* The first thing he does is that he has a self-assessment. That's where it all begins. In order to love Christ more clearly, we have to have a good self-assessment. *“Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect.”*

Now this is the statement of a Christian man who never permitted himself to be satisfied with spiritual attainments. In other words, when you read chapter 3, all the things that could have given him societal privileges, he says “I count all those things as loss.” He was never one who considered himself to be satisfied with his spiritual attainments.

Now obviously, as we saw in the previous verses, 8-11, he was satisfied with the Person and work of Christ. But he was not satisfied with his own Christian life. *“Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect. But I press on to make it my own.”* And here's the reason. *“Because Christ Jesus has made me His own.”*

Men, what is our motivation? Christ has made us His own. That's our motivation for perfection, striving and obedience.

Now I believe that the first step in a correct self-assessment is what I would call *a sanctified dissatisfaction*. Now the Scriptures often warn us against false estimates of our spiritual condition. Here are a couple examples. The church at Sardis had a reputation of being alive, but in reality they were dead. Revelation 3:1. They had reputation, but they had no reality.

Secondly, the church of Laodicea boasted that they were rich. But in God's sight they were *“wretched, poor, blind and naked.”* Revelation 3:17. So the first step in our pilgrimage in this pathway to perfection, to be pleasing to the Lord and to gain all the maturity that God would have for us would be this: self-evaluation, having a sanctified dissatisfaction for where you are.

Now self-satisfaction can be dangerous because it might hinder us in two different directions—making ourselves to be better off than we are, or making ourselves out to be worse than we really are. Both of those can be dangerous. So sanctified dissatisfaction is essential for spiritual progress.

Notice what the Psalmist says in Psalm 42, verses 1 and 2.

*“As the deer pants for flowing streams,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
For the living God.”*

There's a sense, friends, where we need to have a sanctified dissatisfaction. I'm dissatisfied with where I am, but it's sanctified because I know I'm on a journey, on a pathway to striving for maturity. So we need to have the right balance. Paul would tell us this. Don't overrate yourself and don't underrate yourself.

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Paul was so motivated to press on to make it his own because Christ motivated him. Christ got hold of him and Christ had made him His own. So the very first thing we need to do is to have a well thought out, correct self-assessment of where we are. It's what I would call a sanctified dissatisfaction. Be realistic about where you are.

The next step in this process for Paul in this pathway is *a single-minded zeal*. You'll notice that in verse 13—a single-minded zeal. "*Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on.*"

Paul had a single-minded zeal. That made him preoccupied with one thought, and that was the idea that he was neither perfect, nor had he reached the goal. But that does not prevent him from striving after it. That was his singleness. His single-minded zeal was to strive for it, pursuing the goal of knowing Christ intimately and more experientially. That was his goal, his single-minded zeal.

Now I believe, brothers, that the key word in verses 12 and 13 is the word *but*—b-u-t. It's what I would call *the apostolic but*. (*Laughter*) He's not making excuses in verse 12. "*Not that I have already obtained it, but I press on*" in verse 13. "*I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do.*" He is not making excuses, but he is restating the single-minded zeal that he has, knowing Christ more intimately and serving Him more clearly.

Notice the concentration on his goal and what he does about it—two things. There's *a concentration on his goal, "forgetting what lies behind."*

Now men, let's be honest. How often does the evil one resurrect thoughts in your mind of how rotten you are, or things that you've done? You see, that's one of his great weapons. It's to get you to believe that your sins have not been forgiven. How many times has he resurrected in your mind that I should have done this differently? How can God use me because of my failure? How can God use me because of what I've done in the past? Look what I just said to my wife. Look what I just did to my coworker. How can God use me? You see, those are satanic arrows that he throws at us to get us to not think clearly and to interrupt our zeal for Christ and our obedience to Him and His pathway.

So the first thing we have to do is realize this: forgetting what lies behind. It can only restrict us, and it will consume us.

If Christ has forgiven us, how can we not forgive ourselves?

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: One of the most difficult things I've had to do in my life is to forgive myself, because the Lord in His mercy helps me to realize this—that "*as far as the east is from the west,*" so far has He removed your transgressions from you. There's no end to that. Sometimes, men, we just have to realize this, that our sins have been lost in the ocean of God's forgiveness.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: They are lost in the ocean of God's forgiveness. He does not resurrect them. Why should we resurrect them? That's part of our concentrating on forgetting what lies

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behind, because it will consume us and restrict us in the pathway of perfection in our maturity. Yes, sir?

Participant: Why is it so hard for us to forgive anyone, you know, somebody who has wronged us? That's my question. Why is it so hard for us to forgive someone who has wronged us? You know, like you said, Christ forgave us all our sins. But it's so hard for us to forgive someone who has wronged us. I find that difficult at times.

Bruce: Well I can't speak for you, but I know I can speak for myself. First of all, it's pride. I have a right to be hurt! She can't do that to me! Look what she just did! Doesn't she know who I am? I think that first of all, the root cause would be pride.

Secondly, if you want to know how you can forgive somebody else, go back and remember how much God has forgiven you.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You have to go back and look at the cross. I would say that the solution is to look at the cross and see what Christ did to pay for your sins. He's paid for them. He's lost them in the ocean of His forgiveness. How could I not forgive somebody for what he has done to me?

And the Scripture says this. If you don't forgive others, He won't forgive you. That's a serious statement. If you don't forgive others, He will not forgive you. So there's enough motivation to go back to the cross and say, "Lord, forgive me. I've taken advantage of Your forgiveness. I now need to give it away." And what is ministry? Ministry is giving away to somebody else what God has given you. When you give that forgiveness, you're giving away what God has given you. I think that the root cause in my life is pride, because I think I deserve to feel hurt. I have a right to be hurt.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Please.

Participant: Expanding on that, in my own life I think that I don't forgive because I don't think I'm as wicked as the wickedness done to me. I think that without exception most Christians in most of the world greatly underestimate their own wickedness.

I remember that I was once teaching over here at Christ Church. And I made the observation. And I said, "Think of a person who kidnaps a young child, and rapes and murders him. You are every bit as wicked as that person."

Bruce: Amen.

Participant: And a woman came up to me and said, "That's not true; I'm not that bad." And she never came back. *(Laughter)* That's fine, because maybe she had been molested as a child. So I understand it from a pastoral side. But I think my own problem is that I greatly underestimate my wickedness. I'm bad, but I'm not that bad.

Bruce: Good. Thank you, Ted. That's why we have to start with an honest self-assessment of who we are. Now because of this single-minded zeal—to know Christ and to serve Him more clearly,—Paul does not let the past consume him. Nor does he let the past restrict him. Knowing Christ as deeply as he did, he knows that Christ is a better Savior than he is a sinner. Christ is a better Savior than you and I are sinners. That's what motivated him, because he knew this. Christ had hold of him, not his past failures, of which he had many.

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So the first thing he needed to do was this. "Forgetting what lies behind, I press on this journey to spiritual maturity."

Secondly, *he had a determination, "straining to look forward to what lies ahead."* Now he replaces forgetting what lies behind with a movement toward what lies ahead. I call this *replacement therapy*. He replaces what used to be with what now is. He replaces what lies behind with what is forward, to his goal to gain maturity in Christ. He replaces his failures with his view to the future. He doesn't let his past failures drag him down and restrict him or consume him, or hinder him in his journey of spiritual maturity. He uses them as a motivation to move forward towards his goal.

Now I'm reminded of Nehemiah, the building governor who resisted invitations and distractions by stating, "I'm doing a great work, so I cannot come down." Nehemiah chapter 6 verse 3. "I'm doing a great work, so I cannot come down." In other words, he did not let interruptions interfere with his progressing in spiritual maturity and his path to perfection.

James chapter 1 verse 8 reminds us of this. In contrast to a single-minded zeal, "*a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.*"

Concentration is the secret of power. If a river is allowed to overflow its banks, the area around it becomes a swamp. But if that river is dammed up and controlled, it becomes a source of power. It is concentrated in a certain direction.

And a single-minded zeal is Christian maturity. It is wholly a matter of values and priorities, living for that which matters most.

Now we are often used to saying that we live in the past, we live in the present and we live in the future. But I think we should turn that around and say that we live in the future, and I take my future into my present, and my present into my past. I believe that we need to reverse that around. Everything flows from our future, not from our past. We put behind those things of the past. We think of those things going forward.

And so rather than saying that I live in the past, live in the present and live in the future, let's turn that around. I live in the future. I'm going to take that future into my present, where I am right now. And I'm going to take that present into my past. I think that we should at least be future-oriented, forgetting these things which are behind and pressing on to those things which are forward. We need to be future-oriented.

Now one thing we need to understand about the Scripture. In Biblical terminology, the word *forget* does not mean *to fail to remember*. It does not mean to fail to remember. Now apart from senility, hypnosis or a brain freeze, no mature person can forget what has happened in the past. If I could tell you all the painful sins that people have done against me, I could remember the day, I could remember the time, and the person who did it. Now I'm not going to go through the litany of that. But I can remember that. I haven't forgotten those things.

The word *forget* does not mean *forget to remember*. It means *no longer to be influenced or affected by it*. Even though I can remember those things, I'm no longer going to let them affect me or be governed by them. It means no longer to be influenced or to be affected by things of the past. That's the great benefit and joy of forgiveness. We can forgive those who have wounded us. We can forgive those sins that people have

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committed against us. And I can forgive myself for the sins that I've committed against them. It means that I'm no longer going to be influenced or affected by things of the past because of God's grace, because I know this. In verses 8-11 I stand before a holy God because I'm justified by faith alone, and I get credit for the imputed righteousness of the Person and work of Christ. I get credit for His sinless perfection and perfect obedience. Therefore I can stand in the ocean of God's forgiveness. Get on with your life and bring your future down to your present and take your present into your past. Forget those things that are in the past and press on to those things that are forward. We live in the future, not in the past.

When God promises that *"their sins and iniquities I will remember no more"*,-- Hebrews 10—He is not suggesting that He will conveniently have a bad memory. That's not what He's suggesting. That's an impossibility. What God is saying is this. "I will no longer hold their sins against them. Their sins can no longer affect their standing with me or influence My attitude towards them."

Now friends, look at this. God says, "I will no longer hold their sins against them." He says, "No longer will they affect their standing before Me." Once you are justified by faith alone, you're justified by faith alone. When you have the imputed righteousness of Christ given to you, God looks at you as sinlessly perfect and perfectly obedient. It can't change your status with Him.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It's not going to influence His attitude. His attitude toward you doesn't change. His attitude toward you is constant because of the Person and work of Christ, and the fact that you are justified by faith alone. Men, you get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. That standing cannot change.

That's why Paul writes at the very beginning in chapter 1 verse 1 of this particular book. He says, "Dear brothers." Who is he referring to? A brother is a saint. He refers to them as saints. A saint is somebody who has been set apart by God.

So when Paul says, "forgetting these things which are behind," he does not suggest an impossible feat of mental and psychological gymnastics by which we try to erase the sins and mistakes of the past. We don't try to do that. We just lose them in the ocean of God's forgiveness.

It simply means this. We break the power of the past by living in the future.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You can't change the past, men. But you can change the meaning of the past. You can change the meaning of the past when you understand God's forgiveness, and the fact that you can stand before a holy God because of the righteousness of Christ.

There were things in Paul's life that I'm sure would have been weights to hold him back. An example would be 1 Timothy chapter 1, verses 12-17, a whole litany of things that Paul could have used to hold him back.

Transcriber's Note: 1 Timothy 1:12-17, NKJV. *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly*

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abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

Bruce: But they became inspirations to speed him forward. The events did not change, but his understanding of them changed. And that's what God's grace gives us.

I would commend to you the book of Genesis. Turn to the book of Genesis, please. When you have time, read chapters 45-50 of the book of Genesis. It's a great example of how events don't change, but your understanding does.

You're familiar with the story. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. They were essentially trying to kill him—premeditated murder. Years later, through God's providence and God's grace, he's now the #2 man in Egypt. He is the man who distributes grain and corn to the hungry. His brothers come looking for food. And they realize that they see that Joseph is the #2 man in Egypt.

And what do they say? "What will he do if he recognizes us?" And this is what Joseph said. "*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.*" The situation never changed. The event never changed. They still wanted to commit murder when he was a teenager. That never changed. But the meaning of that changed, because he saw God's providence and God's grace and the many years that brought him to this position, he could do what? He could now take care of his brothers who wanted to kill him. I'm sure Joseph understood that, or he wouldn't have said this. "As for you, you meant it for harm. I remember what you were trying to do to me. You were trying to kill me premeditatedly. That's what you wanted to do. I remember that! But the memory of that has changed. Now I can serve you because of God's providence and God's grace. But God meant it all for good." That's God's providence and care for you as one of his saints.

The next thing Paul talks about is *an absorbing vision*. A single-minded zeal, and then in verses 14 and 15 he has an absorbing vision on his pathway to maturity.

Verses 14 and 15. "*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that to you also.*"

Notice. He says, "*I press on.*" Now that's the same verb that can be translated *I follow after*. I'm following after something. That means I'm pressing on.

I like the phrase *I follow after*, because it keeps the vision in mind. His pursuit is to love God, to love Christ, to serve Him more clearly. And so he follows after that vision. That's an absorbing vision that he never gets out of his mind. He had a single-minded zeal, and now he has an absorbing vision.

It carries the idea of intense endeavor. I understand that from the Greeks. They used it to describe a hunter who is pursuing his target. It's the idea of a hunter pursuing his target. And so it's that same zeal that Paul employed when he persecuted the church. He had zeal for the persecution of the church. Now he has zeal for serving the church—Philippians 3:6.

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Transcriber's Note: Philippians 3:6, NKJV. "*Concerning zeal, persecuting the church.*"

Bruce: He was totally absorbed in his vision "*for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus.*"

Now I think there are two extremes that we need to avoid here, men. First of all, *I must do it all* in this journey of maturity. I must do it all. And secondly, *God must do it all*. I must do it all or God must do it all.

The first describes the *activist*. I must do it all. It's up to me. The second one—God must do it all,—reveals the *quietist*. And both are headed for failure.

There is this dimension of Christianity. Let go and let God. Now that sounds good. It's a clever slogan. But it does not fully describe the process of Christian living and Christian maturity.

The Christian with a spiritual mind realizes that God must work in him if he is going to run the race. Look at Philippians 2, verses 12 and 13.

Transcriber's Note: Philippians 2:12-13, NKJV. "*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*"

Bruce: We should not be the activists; we should not be the quietists. We should be the *dualists*, the ones who do both. I know that God can work through me. And God must work in me before He's going to do something through me.

Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:7. "*Train yourself for godliness.*"

Now some people in Christ are so busy dying to themselves that they never come back to life again to run the race. (*Laughter*) And others are so sure that they can make it on their own that they never stop to read the Word and pray, asking for the power of the Holy Spirit. Both of those are aberrations of the balance that we need to have. "*Train yourself for godliness.*"

And lastly, there's *a secure foundation*—verse 16. "*Only let us hold to what we have obtained.*" In other words, he's saying, "I've just given you some insights into the practical things to do Scripturally. Give yourself to those. Press on to those things. Give yourself to that. Hold on to those things. Make sure that you're sticking with them."

A literal translation of verse 16 would be this. "*Only to what we have obtained, with the same let us keep in line.*" He's always keeping in mind that which he needs to be doing for the glory of Christ. The principle is this. We're still far from perfect. But in Christ we should become more mature, and become more perfect in Christ. So let our lives be regulated by the constant application of this principle. "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

I think one application in verse 16 would be this. Hold on to that which you know. Follow that which you've learned.

In Proverbs 24 there are three words that he uses—*wisdom, knowledge* and *understanding*. Knowledge is seeking to know. Wisdom is the application of knowledge. And understanding is the consequences of your wisdom. Those are three words that we need to understand—knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

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And Paul is telling us this. *Apply what you know and watch yourself grow.* Apply what you know. Oftentimes we say, "When is God going to show me this?" He will show you that after you've mastered what he has already given you. We need to obey what we know, and watch ourselves grow.

Apply what you know. Wisdom is the application of knowledge. Oftentimes in our culture we think that education is the basis of our knowledge. Sometimes I think that the young woman who has raised three kids at home as a stay-at-home mom does a wonderful job, and knows more about teaching godliness in women than I would. That's why we ask her to do that.

The same thing is that just because someone has a Ph.D. or a doctorate does not mean that they're more wise. Wisdom is the application of knowledge.

There are two theories of knowledge and wisdom in the history of our culture. There's the Greek side, which says that wisdom is the accumulation of knowledge. The Greeks would say that the more you know, the more knowledgeable you are, the more wise you are. So let's just hypothetically say that there are a hundred things that would make a person absolutely, totally wise. The Greeks would say that if a person knows 75 of those 100, he is wiser than the person who knows 50 of those 100.

But the Biblical description of wisdom is different. The Hebrew concept of wisdom is the application of knowledge. They would say that the person who knows 75 of those and can apply 40 of them more effectively than the person who knows 75 is wiser than the one who knows 75. It's the application of knowledge that counts.

And so the adage would be this. Obey what you know and watch yourself grow. As you grow in Christ, God will reveal more to you. Remember this. Revelation is progressive. You don't get it all at once. He gives us enough to know what we should do to grow, and we become obedient to that. As we do that, we begin to see that God gives us more things to do and more ways to grow. So the old adage would be obey what you know and watch yourself grow.

True religion, then, is not a matter of precept upon precept, but it's a matter of basic principles of Scripture. They are few but very important. And if by the light of God's special revelation in Scripture these principles are consistently applied, then all the rest will follow. God will not refuse to give further light to him who walks by the light already given. Walk by the light you've been given, and God will give you more.

What is vital always is this: that we should live by the truth that we've already recognized and accepted. I recognize this as truth. I accept it as truth. And now I'm going to live by that.

And Paul reminds us of this: that the Christian life is not a game. It's not a game, it's a race that demands the very best that is in us. Too many Christians have divided lives. One part enjoys the things of the world and the other part tries to live for the things of the Lord. They get ambitious for things and start minding earthly ambitions.

And Paul summarizes by saying this. Our calling is a very high calling. It's also a heavenly calling. And if we live for this world, we will lose the prize that goes with our high calling, the glory of God in heaven that Paul pursued by his pathway to maturity.

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Men, I think the key phrase for me would be this. We live in the future, bring it into our present, and take it into the past for the glory of God. May it be so for His glory.

Let's pray. Father, remind us that we live in the future, that our sins have been forgiven, that we've lost them in the ocean of Your forgiveness and love. And Father, may we take our high calling, our heavenly calling not to live in this world but to be pursuing the maturity of a relationship in loving Christ more dearly. And may that become our reality today in our present life, taking our present into our past. And do not let our past hinder or constrict us. And may it be so for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen. (*Applause*)