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LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND

Continual Repentance

(Philippians 3:10-14)

Bottom Line: The Christian life is one of continual repentance and pursuit of Christ.

Seeing as how we just started a new year, have you made any New Year's resolutions? What are they? What are you doing to ensure that you see these commitments through?

On a whole, how do you think we as a society handle the weight of commitment? What are some things that prevent us from keeping our commitments?

Read Philippians 3:10-14. What is the "goal" in verse 12 that Paul is saying he has not already obtained? (Hint: v. 10).

There is a disturbing trend among American Christianity that says, "I've done all I need to do to be saved, now I just need to coast and bide my time." Now of course, none of us would actually say this (probably), but our actions say it for us. We refuse to call our wayward children to repentance or even question the state of their soul because they "prayed that one time at church camp" when they were little. Or we assume that all of the calls to come to the altar and confess our sins before God are meant for someone else—never "me." We read about the Great Commission, and agree with it, but "I'm not gifted or called to participate in that, that's for someone else."

Do you personally see this trend in the broader culture of American evangelicalism? Yes or no? If yes, what other examples of this do you see?

How does this kind of approach to the Christian life compare to how Paul describes his approach in Philippians 3:10-14?

Paul says in verse 10 that his goal is "to know Him and the power of His resurrection...to share in His sufferings...to become like Him in His death...to attain the resurrection from the dead." And then he says in verse 12 that he has not already obtained this nor is he perfect. What Paul is *not* saying is that he has to earn these things. He has spent the entire first half of this chapter, and other whole books of the Bible, to counteract the idea that our salvation must be earned. But what Paul *is* saying is that his conversion on the road to Damascus wasn't the finish line of his walk with Christ, it was only the starting line. He still has a race to run. He has to "press on."

According to verse 13, what all does "pressing on" entail for Paul?

There are two things that Paul mentions he does in order to "press on" toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The first is that he "forgets what lies behind." Paul has a future orientation. What's done is done. Paul is not concerned with anything that has happened in the past, he is concerned with working now to shape his future.

What things might Paul be referring to when he says he is "forgetting what lies behind?" What things in your life do you need to forget about? Does this include only bad things? Or also good things? Given the context that we're talking about here, that there is a

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“goal” that we are trying to reach of growing in maturity in Christ, in what sense do we need to “forget” even the good things we’ve done in the past?

The second thing Paul says he does is that he “strains forward to what lies ahead.” He is not content with living in the past, he understands that his race is not yet finished, and he has a lot of running left to do (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:25-26).

Paul describes his Christian life as one that is constantly forgetting the past and reorienting his aim towards Christ. We have a word for this reorienting of our priorities: repentance. The life that Paul describes is one of continual repentance. He is continually repenting of his sin and waywardness (“forgetting what lies behind”) and likewise he is continually course-correcting and re-affirming his commitment to Christ (“straining forward to what lies ahead”). According to Paul, the Christian life is not characterized by a one-time repentance, but continual repentance followed up with continual pursuit of Christ.

How often should repentance and confession play a part in our lives? Daily? Weekly? Monthly?

We talked about what things prevent us from fulfilling our commitments to our New Year’s resolutions. What things prevent us from fulfilling our commitment to persevere in pursuing Christ? How can we rid these things from our lives?

Reflection: Read these aloud, using your discretion about which questions should be pondered and which questions should be discussed.

J.D. Greear says, “salvation does indeed happen in a moment, and once you are saved you are always saved. The mark, however, of someone who is saved is that they maintain their confession of faith until the end of their lives. Salvation is not a prayer you pray in a one-time ceremony and then move on from; salvation is a posture of repentance and faith that you begin in a moment and maintain for the rest of your life.” Does this describe your Christian life? If you were to examine your life right now, what evidence is there in the past year that you’ve continued in repentance and faith in Christ? The past month? The past week? The past 24 hours? Like Paul, our Christian life is one of *continual* repentance and faith. If this does not describe your life, you may be in danger of missing the point of what Christianity is all about. But the good news is that all you need to do is repent and believe upon Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Is this something you need to do today?

Is the trajectory and aim of your life one of “pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ?” In other words, is the direction your life is heading toward Jesus and Kingdom purposes? Are your ambitions and aspirations in-line with what the bible says we need to be committed to: the glory of God? If not, first ask yourself: “Are my desires and ambitions godly?” If they’re not, then no matter how badly you want them, you need to forsake them and pursue Christ. If they are, then the second question you need to ask is “how can I reorient what I’m pursuing so that I am doing these things for the glory of God and the sake of Christ?” Then you need to act on the decisions that you make. How can we help you do this?