

Priorities

Are your priorities straight?

Today as a New Years Resolution to be setting right priorities.

A couple I heard about in Atlanta read that My Fair Lady was still playing on Broadway in New York City. They wanted to go so badly, so they bought their tickets months ahead of time and planned their vacation.

The long-awaited day came and they flew to New York City. They presented their tickets, walked in, and sat down in wonderful seats, seven rows from the front, near the orchestra.

To the man's amazement, the entire place filled up, except the seat right next to him; He was curious about. At the intermission, he leaned over in conversation with the lady in the second seat away from him and commented how they had to wait so many months to get tickets to a performance. When there was such a demand for seats, why would someone not come. Did she have any idea?

She said, "Yes, as a matter of fact, these two seats are mine. This one and that one." She explained further, "You see, that seat belonged to my husband and he died."

The man said, "I'm ... I'm terribly sorry. But couldn't you have invited a friend to come with you?" Her answer was classic.

She said, "No, they're all at eh funeral home right now."¹

In chapter three of Philippians the apostle Paul speaks of how believers are heaven bound and at the same time earth bound.

They are people of two realms, citizens of earth by birth, and citizens of heaven by the new birth. In Phil. 3:20 Paul writes, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ..."

As citizens of heaven we live on earth to bring a touch of heaven wherever we go. The problem is that earth operates in a different way than heaven.

We can become so earthly minded that we're no heavenly good.

"For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things." (v. 18-19).

Paul's answers the problem of bad influences by having good examples,

¹ B. Clayton Bell, *Preaching Magazine*, May-June 1989.

“Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” (v. 17).

We need examples of how to walk as a Christian in a non-Christian world. Sometimes discipleship is caught more than taught.

“This is how a heavenly lifestyle is lived on the earth.”

The Key to a good example is someone with right priorities.

Paul explains his lifestyle:

“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become **perfect**,
but I press on so that I may lay hold of
that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.
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,
I press on toward the **goal** for the **prize**
of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:12-14)

In this Scripture we understand that Paul had not yet achieved perfection, but was pursuing it.

I. Perfection as a Goal

Paul’s goal was perfection. It was not in his grasp, but he was grasping.

becoming perfect (Gk. telos) “Fully accomplished”
used fruit that is ripened,
character that is developed and matured.

Paul isn’t claiming that he as arrived at perfection at all.

In fact he says that he hasn’t obtained it;
he hasn’t become perfect;
That he hasn’t laid hold of it.

Though he hasn’t arrived, he says, but he is aiming for the target.

He’s headed in the right direction. The target is Christ.

Paul’s past...

1. Finding Christ

But whatever things were gain to me,
those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ (v. 7).

Paul's religious achievement gave him a false sense of righteousness.
Finding Christ gave him true righteousness, which is based on faith in Christ.
Religion was a lot of work, with high demands and low results.
Religion brought one thing: insecurity, self-righteousness, and no salvation.

Finding Christ was the start, knowing Christ the path.

2. Knowing Christ

In verse 8 Paul says that knowing Christ is far greater than anything.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value
of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the
loss of all things and count them but rubbish so that I may gain
Christ (v. 8).

Compared to knowing Christ everything else is a waste – rubbish.

3. The Goal of Christlikeness

This is a very unique aspect of Paul's life goal - gaining Christ.

“...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection
and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (v. 10-11)

This goal is beyond knowing Christ and getting to know Him, to experiencing Him.

Knowing someone is limited to a certain setting: school days, soldiers in battle, or
co-workers on a project, or friends at church. Paul is writing as someone who is
experiencing Christ in everything He has and will go through.

Ultimately Paul writes of the future experience of all believers:

“... the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state
into conformity with the body of His glory...” (v. 20-21).

Knowing the ultimate end of glory, Paul shapes his statement using the phrase, “laid hold of by Christ”. In verse 12 he writes,

...I press on so that I may lay hold of
that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus

This term means “*to seize and take possession of.*”

This is what Christ did to him when he first met Christ on the road to Damascus. His goal was to fulfill the purpose for which He was called and take hold of Christ. His goal was to know Christ, to be like Christ, and to be all Christ had in mind for him.

Paul’s goal ...

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, I press on toward the goal for the **prize** of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:12-14)

Goal – “mark” – “a goal on which to fix your attention.”

Christians all too often settle for lesser goals than the heavenly one of the high calling of God. There are good earthly goals – job, education, house, family. But the heavenly goals have to do with spiritual things that we will give an account for on the ‘day of judgment’.

Paul spoke of this in First Corinthians,

“Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” (1 Cor. 3:12-15)

Again Paul insists on the coming day of judgment for all believers,

“Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men...”
(2 Cor. 5:9-11).

Paul fixes his attention on the heavenly goal – to receive a reward on that day.
 - To hear the Master say, “Well done...”

I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God ...

The Prize –Paul borrows from the Roman games. The prize is the reward given by the judges of the winners of athletic events. This term captures an athlete’s dedication and discipline, as he prepares himself for the games.

Stuart Brisco writes,

“Paul sees a similarity between the athlete and the Christian in the area of purposefulness and dedication. So it is not hard to see how he could get many things into perspective that would otherwise be vague and fuzzy. Suffering doesn’t seem half as insufferable if there’s a prize. Hardship is nowhere near as hard if there is a reward. Loss of material blessings that are temporal is so much easier to take in the light of spiritual blessings that are eternal. So he thinks of a prize.”²

II. Priorities and Purpose

In order to accomplish his aspiration, Paul purposed to do **one thing in two parts**:
 ...forget the past and go forward.

1. He let the past go.

The past can be like an anchor that stops all forward movement.

Paralysis analysis – fear of failure, of rejection, of the future

Reaching forward to what lies ahead... I press on

“Stretching forward” ... I press on...

If we can picture a runner in a race as he approaches the finish line he leans into the finish line with all his might.

2. He focuses his attention.

One thing I do...

The secret of moving forward in any area is focus;

“... one thing I do, not these thirty things I dabble in...”

² Stuart Briscoe, *Happiness beyond our Happenings*, (Wheaton: Herald Shaw Publishers, 1993), p. 115.

- Pay attention, selectively focus attention, effort, resources and time.

One industrialist made a statement,

“There are two things that are the most difficult to get people to do:
to think and do things in the order of their importance.”

Years ago we had cable TV and a video recorder. When I watched I could fast-forward the commercials and enjoy my show without distraction.

Since coming to know Christ, Paul focused on his goal, without worthless distractions.

3. He established priorities

Priorities help us achieve our purpose as we become purpose-driven.

In his letter to the Colossians Paul wrote of the mystery God had revealed among the Gentiles “Christ in you the hope of glory”; then he added his action goal:

“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” (Col. 1:28-29).

Paul had a purpose for which he labored intensely (agonize)– to bring people to Christ, and then by bringing believers to completion, or maturity. (telos)

Paul proclaiming Christ, admonished and wisely taught all men.

Jesus gave each of us His priority for our lives

“Do not worry then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt. 6:31-33).