

THIS ONE THING I DO

What was the “*one thing*” the Apostle Paul wanted most to do? Did he succeed? Is this what you want most to do? If you don't know or are not sure, read on.

The title is taken from a quotation from the Epistle to the Philippians in chapter 3, verses 13 and 14. In this text the Apostle Paul leaves us an example that we also, as Christians, should follow. He had a very definite objective -- a goal toward which we also must bend all our energies to reach.

“But this one thing I do,” said the Apostle, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

After accepting the invitation of Jesus to deny self, take up our cross daily and follow in his footsteps with all sincerity and determination, we must then “*press toward the mark*”. What is this “*mark*” of which Paul speaks? Is it not the mark of *perfect love* that was the “*new*” commandment Jesus gave us? The one personifying that Love was our Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit of Christ, indwelling us, will produce the fruitage of this love in our lives *as we allow Him full sovereignty*. This is one of the “*mysteries*” revealed to us in God's Word. Colossians 1:27 tell us, “*To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory.***” Thus, Paul's goal, and the highest goal we can have, is to *apprehend* the **Lord Jesus Christ** himself. Paul cries out, “*Oh, that I might **know** him and the power of his resurrection (life) and the fellowship of his suffering if by any means I might attain unto **the resurrection of the dead***” (Ph. 3:10,11).

What does Paul mean when he says, “*forgetting those things that are behind*”? Does this mean that we are to wipe all past things out of our minds completely? No, we think not, but rather that we are to *lay aside* the things of the past, things which would be a burden, an obstacle in our race, just as looking back while running a race would slow us down. We must dismiss all that would be a hindrance to our Christian life, such as mistakes of the past, old habits, wrong beliefs, wrong behavior, wrong goals, and wrong desires for material possessions, wealth, influence, and power. *Jesus has set us free from these things*. We are no longer to feel guilty about the past after heartfelt repentance and confession. We need no longer be tied down to this kind of burdensome life. We read in John 8:32 & 36, “*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*” “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” Praise God!

Jesus has set us free from the bondage of sin. Because of Jesus' sacrificial death, we are no longer ruled by Satan. We have a new Master and a new allegiance. Romans 6:18 tells us, “*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*” Then in Colossians 1:12-13 we read, “*Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.*”

Since Jesus has made this all possible, and at such a great price, we should delight to put far from us all obstacles to our Christian goal and in their place to reach out toward those things that are before us, i.e., the goal of “*knowing Christ*”. In 1 Corinthians 2:2 Paul tells us quite clearly, “*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you **except Jesus Christ and him crucified.***” Paul's goal was to follow where

Jesus would lead, thus laying down his life, out of love, for his Lord and the brethren. Being faithful unto death, he knew he would one day be made like his Lord, live in his glorious presence and enjoy him forever. What a goal!

Our Lord in Matthew 6:33 said, *"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* By *"all these things,"* he meant the necessities of life. But note carefully these necessities are **added** to us, *if* we seek the Kingdom **first**. Yes, the Lord has and will always provide when we obey Him!

The secret of success is constancy of purpose, which means to be steadfast, unfaltering, unchanging, and enduring faithfully to the end. How easy it is to place other things first and God last! The world, the flesh and our great Adversary tempt us here constantly. Instead of making our chief concern the seeking of what we should eat, drink, wear, or what new things to buy, let us throw off these transitory toys and sand castles. Let us be resolved that in the strength of the Lord we will **"seek first the Kingdom of God"** and then let's watch how the Lord will fulfill His part of this promise!

Let us look again at *"Forgetting those things which are behind."* As Paul could set aside the memories of his previous hatred of Christians and his horrendous treatment of them, likewise, we also should lay aside our past grievous sins. As Paul gave up his position, prestige, politics, time -- yes, his whole way of life for Christ -- likewise let us give gladly, generously, of our time, talent, money, and service to God, and set aside the world with its transitory attractions. Let us not seek honor and prestige among fickle men or center our hearts on the things money can buy that moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break in and steal! We will do well to evaluate what true riches are and make them our lifetime goals and choices.

The Apostle Paul, in the text under consideration, tells us that he was *determined* to "forget" the past and look forward to what lay before him. Let us also be resolved to: 1) rededicate ourselves to fully obey God; and 2) press on with determination in the narrow way "following the lamb wheresoever he leads us" (Rev. 14:4), trusting Him for each step of the way! For "every step of the onward way He makes new scenes to rise" with many blessings and surprises.

The Apostle Paul had much to overcome in not allowing his past to deter him. In Acts 7:54-60 we read of the stoning of Stephen and that the witnesses laid down their clothes at Saul's feet. Paul (at that time still Saul of Tarsus) was consenting to the death of this one whose face shone as an angel. Could he ever forget Stephen's powerful testimony and radiant presence? No, we can be sure he never did; nevertheless, he did not let this or anything else in his past become an anchor to hold him back. If anything, he would look back to the wonderful conviction and bravery of Stephen, and this would help him face his persecutors more determinedly. As for his part in his death, he knew and was ever grateful for God's forgiveness.

In Acts 8:1-3, we find Saul actively persecuting the Church, arresting Christians and dragging them off to prison to be killed. Could he forget the noble deaths of these followers of Jesus? Let us turn to 1 Corinthians 15:9 and 10 and see what Paul tells us. *"For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.**"* Yes, Paul at this point, by the grace of God alone, could put the past behind him. The Lord would show him what great things he was yet to suffer for the cause of Christ. No, Paul never forgot what he did in the past to his Christian brethren, but he did not let this hold him back in his zeal to serve the Lord. Again, he could rest in the absolute

knowledge that God had cast his sins “as far as the East is from the West!” Take your Bible out and read what God says about our past in Isaiah 1:16-19 and Psalms 103:8-13. God is rich in mercy; indeed, His mercy endures forever and His mercies are over all His works. In view of all this love and mercy on God's part, is it not “a reasonable service” when we present our bodies a living sacrifice? A lifetime of praise is not enough for all our God and Jesus have done for us.

A brief reading of 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 will reveal to us the persecution, stonings, beatings, imprisonments, and shipwrecks Paul suffered throughout his ministry for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. He was to experience much of the same sufferings that he had inflicted upon the early church, and more. But no haunting memory or remorse deterred him from *‘this one thing I do.’* He continued with great perseverance to *“press down on the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* His one goal never faltered or got laid aside, for he was driven by his love for Jesus to **know** him intimately, and he counted it a privilege to suffer “outside the gate, bearing his reproach” (Heb. 13:13).

In Psalms 90:12, the Psalmist says, *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”* In Colossians 4:5 we are exhorted to “make the most of every opportunity.”

And in Eph. 5:15-17, we find Paul's exhortation to us: *“Walk circumspectly ... redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”* This means we are not to waste this precious commodity, but rather give as much time as possible to Bible study and meditation; to devotion, fellowship, and worship, and to be “broken bread and poured out wine” for his brethren, serving the Lord in any and all capacity; entering every door He opens for us to serve. These are the things eternal and the *only* things that will follow us into Eternity.

Paul fully realized this, and so should we. Let us be faithful and follow his good example. In Romans 12:1 and 2, we are invited to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. This is an invitation, not a command. Can we do this? Not of ourselves, but as Paul firmly announced, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” But it means giving up our will and learning to do God's will by being obedient to Him in all of life's affairs. Do you find this too difficult to do? Don't despair. God will give you grace and strength to do it. But we must be watchful and prayerful, for we have three formidable enemies to contend with: the world, the flesh, and the devil, none of whom wish to see us reach our goal! The world tries to attract us with every variety of allurements and flattery it can think of to coax us to leave this blessed narrow way of life and to take instead the broad and easy way that leads to destruction (Mat. 7:13). We are *in the world*, but we are not to be *part of the world* (John 17:14), with all its false and empty baubles. Then we have our own flesh with which to contend. This is unavoidable, for we “have this treasure in an earthen vessel,” but let us not forget the remainder of that scripture, “that the excellency of Christ might be manifest!” (2 Cor. 4:7). So while the Psalmist declares that we are “sinful from birth” (Psalms 51:5), and the wise man tells us that the heart of man is full of evil (Ecclesiastes 9:3), Paul encourages us with a wonderful truth about this “flesh”: *“For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God!”* (Col.3:3) We are now *“new creatures in Christ Jesus,”* (II Cor.5:17) and we have the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen and hold us up. Then, of course, there is our arch enemy, Satan, who continually tempts us by taking advantage of our physical, moral, and mental weaknesses, thus urging us to surrender to worldly pleasures and fleshly desires. To be able to successfully resist and overcome these three enemies, we need to put on *“the whole armor of God”* as described by Paul in Ephesians 6:10-18. We can't do without it! One of the most powerful means at our command in reaching our goal is the renewing of our minds -- the transformation of our thoughts from unrighteousness to holiness. We will be blessed as we learn to *“bring every thought into captivity to Christ”* (2 Cor.

10:5). As we do our part, the Lord's Holy Spirit will come to our rescue, thus ridding our minds of everything that is lustful, sinful, greedy, selfish, and carnal, replacing these things with the *"fruit of the Holy spirit which is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance"* (Galatians 5:22 and 23). With all these virtues filling and controlling our minds, we cannot fail.

God has given us some wonderfully great and very precious promises to help us live to please Him. Here are just a few:

1. "I will *never* leave thee nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).
2. "I will *guide thee* with mine eye" (Psalms 32:8).
3. "The steps of a good man are *ordered* by God" (Psalms 37:23).
4. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and *He delivers them*" (Ps 34:7).
5. "Lo, *I am with you always*, even unto the end of the world (age)" (Matthew 28:20).

How our hearts should rejoice as we fully believe and trust in these blessed promises the Lord gives to us. *Do we believe them?*

As we look into our past, we should be thankful for every experience, good or bad, knowing that *"God works all things for the good of them that love him, those who are called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8:28). Experiences, be they good or bad, help develop in us the fruit of righteousness, "if we are rightly exercised by them."

A proper retrospect in reviewing our past, not with bitterness but with acceptance and thankfulness, will:

1. Build up our character.
2. Help us to learn that God's grace is sufficient.
3. Make us realize that He who has begun this work in us, will complete it (Philippians 1:6).

There is one thought that should be in our hearts on arising every morning: *"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?"* (Psalms 116:12) The Psalmist himself answers his own question, saying, *"I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord; I will pay my vows unto the Most High"* (vs. 13 & 14).

1. The cup means our justification - the gift of God.
2. To call upon the name of the Lord - in Prayer, Praise, and Thanksgiving.
3. Pay my vows -- fulfilling our covenant to offer a "sacrifice of praise."

Here are some of the things from our past that we can forget:

1. Loving the approval of others (pride and vanity).
2. Loving self (selfishness and idolatry).
3. Loving the "things of this world" (lust and greed).
4. Loving worldly friendships (which take us from our goal).

Let us empty our minds of the above carnal desires and fill them with the following:

1. Faith in God -- If we have little, pray for more faith.

2. Hope in God's Promises -- Which will be as an anchor to our soul.
3. Self-control -- To be disciplined and moderate in all things.
4. Patience -- To have cheerful endurance, a meek and quiet spirit.
5. Piety -- To be holy and filled with Godliness.
6. Brotherly Love -- Laying down our lives for our brethren.
7. Love of God with all that this means --Worshipping, obeying, trusting, serving, and even dying for Him.

Let us always remember that *"you are not your own, for you have been bought with a price, therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's"* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

How can we glorify God? Jesus tells us it is by "bearing much fruit" (John 15:8). In closing, let us remember:

1. To follow Paul as he followed Christ.
2. That the Word of God is to be our daily companion.
3. To "fix our eyes" on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.
4. That we make our calling and election sure by pressing on to the mark of perfect love.

My Goal Is Christ

Ah, tell me not of gold or treasure,
Of pomp and beauty here on earth!
There's not a thing that gives real pleasure
Of all this world displays for worth.
Each heart will seek and love its own;
My goal is Christ and Christ alone.

The world and her pursuits will perish;
Her beauty's fading like a flower;
The brightest schemes the earth can cherish
Are but a pastime of an hour.
Each heart will seek and love its own;
My goal is Christ and Christ alone.

Against this tower there's no prevailing;
His Kingdom passes not away;
His throne abides, despite assailing,
From henceforth unto endless day.
Each heart will seek and love its own;
My goal is Christ and Christ alone.

And though a pilgrim I must wander,
Still absent from the One I love,
He soon will have me with him yonder

in his own Glory Realms above.
Triumphantly, I therefore own,
My goal is Christ and Christ alone.

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