**Phil. 3:12-4:7 – Forgetting The Past And Practical Advice On Various Topics**

We all have things from our past that we are not proud of. Things we wish we had not said or done. In some cases, we have sought forgiveness, yet the past still comes to mind. And there are people who will not let it go either, who live in the past and it controls their life even today. Then there are those who will not let you forget the past. They remind you of your failures. Let’s deal with that and other things.

**1) Keys to forgetting our past.** In **vs. 12** Paul says that his becoming like Christ has not been obtained nor reached its full potential or experienced the resurrection or suffering for Christ. Paul reminds us that we should never be satisfied with where we are at spiritually. As a Christian, there is a desire as **Rom. 7** tells us, that we want to be like Christ. It is lifelong journey and no one has arrived there yet.

Paul also reminds us in **vs. 12** to not compare ourselves to others as **Warren Wiersbe** points out. We can always find someone to compare our walk with God too and think we are doing pretty good. We need to guard against that and having an attitude of wanting to grow helps us to not go down that road.

Paul had not yet **“obtained” (lay hold of, get possession of)** what he had talked about for he knew it was a lifetime endeavor. Paul was actively desiring to know Christ and the power of the resurrection.

The idea of **“perfect” vs. 12 means “full maturity, brought to the goal, bring one’s character to perfection.”** Even the great apostle saw room for growth in his own life. It encourages me that my desire is to be more like Christ and that it is something that I will work on until I am with the Lord. Paul had not yet reached where he wanted to be and that should encourage all of us.

Paul says that because Christ has made me His own, he will **“press”** on to maturity. Paul says he is pressing on **“to speed on, drive, to follow on, pursue.”** His motivation for doing so, for desiring to grow, is because he belongs to Christ.

Now, let us see what Paul notes are keys to forgetting our past. We see this in **vss. 13-14** and this is where we will finish this morning. Whatever has directed or affected our life from our past, in **vs. 13** Paul gives us our first point on dealing with our past. Here it is:

**1) We must make a conscious choice to move forward.** Before we think that is obvious, how many people do we know whose past controls their present. I have known people like that in my lifetime and you may have also or currently do. So we know that it does affect people.

Paul says in **vs. 13** that he needed to “forget” what was behind him. That could be the things mentioned in **vss. 4-6**, in addition to what would pop up in his mind from his past. The word **“forgetting” carries the idea of “neglecting” or “no longer caring for”** what may have been the guiding things in our life. He had to choose to **“disregard”** how he had lived or what he had leaned on to make his life complete.

**Point:** For some, that means that when we have our past come up in conversations or in our mind, things that hurt or hindered us or that we did to others but have been forgiven, we have to remind ourselves and at times, others, that the past is the past and that is not who we are now - if a Christian, for sure, we should not be who we once were. We cannot change the past, as **Bill Mounce** notes.

As **Warren Wiersbe** says, **“We cannot change the past, but we can change the meaning of the past.”**

**Point:** Do not live in guilt and do not live in the past that people will at times bring up. There is nothing we can do to undo the past. Hopefully, that is who we were, not who we are. And most people, if they were honest, would admit that there are things from their past that they are not proud of, mistakes made, things said. It is easy to point fingers and bring up someone’s past mistakes or actions and try to ignore our own. So, step one is a conscious choice to let go.

Since Paul is using a picture of a race, it seems, in describing his pushing forward, a runner who looks behind stumbles or who lives in a past defeat that overwhelms never gets farther in the race. They never win, they give up. We cannot be that way.

**2) We focus on what God wants for us now.** In **vs. 13** Paul talks about **“straining forward”** to what lies ahead. This word means **“to stretch out farther, to reach out towards, looking forward,”** like a runner stretching out at the finish line to get to the tape first, or leaning forward as he runs. When we are focused on God’s eternal perspective, looking back just causes us to get off course, stumble and fall.

We need to look at what God is doing in our life now and wants to do in the future. Where does He want us to serve? In what area? What do I need to grow in spiritually? What do I study? How is my prayer life? In other words, by focusing on growing to be like Christ **(Rom. 8:29)**, it helps us to have the right attitude and perspective on life. Stop letting the past dictate the present and the future.

We can learn from the past, but it cannot control us. We know where we have to grow but we cannot allow it to guide us now. Move forward, focus on what God wants for us now. This is a choice we make.

**3) Be consistent and persistent as we move forward.** In **vs. 14** Paul says that he presses on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. To **“press on” means “to run swiftly in order to catch something or someone, to speed on”**, and as used here it has the picture of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal.

Ultimately, our reward is in heaven with the Lord. We know that but we must, while here on earth, be moving forward, not controlled by the past. We study the Word, serve, pray, help others, be humble, and continue to be more like Jesus.

There will come a day when believers will be rewarded for what they have done for the Lord **(1 Cor. 3)**. But Paul may simply have been reminding his readers to stay focused on what really matters, the things of the Lord and how they affect us today.

I want us to jump down now to **Phil. 4**, which has some of the more well-known verses in the NT, I believe, such as **vss. 6-9**. We will look at some things in chapter 4 today and continue next week.

Just to fill in the rest of **Phil. 3**, Paul had encouraged the believers to have a right view of themselves before God in **vss. 16-17**, to pursue the goal of honoring Christ. Paul then warned them about false teachers again in **vss. 18-19**, that our home is in heaven **(vss. 20-21)** and for them and us to stand firm, be strong, in the Lord **(Phil. 4:1)**.

We now come back to the issue of unity in **Phil. 4:2-3**. This cannot be overlooked. Here it is:

**1) Problems that cause disunity cannot be swept under the rug.** In **vss. 2-3** Paul deals with a situation at Philippi between two individuals. It could have been two guys, it just happens to be two ladies. We do not know what the problem was, but it was big enough that it was causing issues in the church, and it is possible that people were taking sides.

There are many churches who try to ignore issues, to not confront when needed (because who likes to do that), and do nothing when people are causing friction. We excuse it with things like, “Well, they are so nice” or “They do so many things for the church,” as if that gives them the freedom to say what they want and cause problems. It does not. We still need to guard what comes out of our mouth.

In some cases, people treat their opinions as the opinions that matter. We all have opinions but opinions of everyone leads to chaos at times. We can agree to disagree on things and yet pursue the same goals.

These two ladies at Philippi were fellow workers in the Gospel so they were faithful to the Lord in serving and telling others but something had happened between them. Paul **“entreats” (admonish, exhort, encourage)** Euodias and Syntyche to **“agree”** in the Lord. These two could agree to disagree and pursue helping the work of Christ but their issue is such that Paul has to say something.

Paul wants them to be in harmony, to have the same views, to be humble. There may have been one of these ladies looking down on the other and making a big deal about a disagreement they had. The call to unity in this verse is based on the Lord. The Holy Spirit is the One Who keeps us in harmony and unity. We are to love one another as followers of Christ **(Jn. 13:15)**.

Before we analyze this a little deeper, look at **vs. 3**. The problem is big enough that Paul is asking for someone else to **help (to take hold to assist, aid)**, if possible, the situation get resolved.

There are **two** thoughts here. **One**, the word for **“companion”**, can mean someone who worked with Paul at Philippi in ministry, a colleague, an associate, or, **two**, as some scholars believe, the Greek word could be a person’s name. That is based on the fact that we know the names of the two ladies that were at odds and Clement is mentioned. This would be my view but it does not matter who Paul was addressing, it was just that he knew someone needed to step in and help.

These women had served side by side with Clement, Paul, and others. There may have been people in the church at Philippi who had come to faith in Christ as a result of a conversation with one of these ladies. There is the thought that they both may have been deaconess’s. That is possible. What we do know is that they were active in serving.

We also know that these are not false believers, fake Christians, for their names are written in the book of life **(vs. 3)**.

**What does dealing with situations such as this look like:** Well, considering that it was a public problem, it had to be dealt with. If this was happening here, we would have everyone involved come into a meeting with the elders and talk through whatever the situation is to try to reach a conclusion that takes care of the situation. If the dissension continued, then the person who refused to cooperate and get things right would be confronted and if they still refused, they would be brought before the church.

This is serious stuff, not something to trifle with. It ruins our testimony to the world when we are fighting among ourselves as believers.

Many things can cause disunity - selfishness, pride, anger. The list could go on. The point is that when we practice **Phil. 2**, and put others first, many issues go away. We realize that opinions are opinions and it is okay to have them and to share them, depending on how we do that, but we need to guard against dissension. And we do that by confronting it when necessary because we love people and God’s church.

Now, Paul encourages the church because he wants them to keep their eyes on the Lord.

**3) Find things to rejoice in.** Look at **vs. 4**. Rejoice, be glad. The word is used twice in **vs. 4** and is a command to rejoice because attitude matters. This is what we need to do. Everyone of us can find things to rejoice in, to thank the Lord for. Paul does not want us getting bogged down in the problems that sometimes surface at church, though he is not saying that we ignore them.

Nor is this meaning that we have to be happy over difficult circumstances that may occur in our life. The point is that joy goes beyond those things. We rejoice in Christ because of Who He is and what He has done.

We cannot produce joy on our own. It is a fruit, a work, of the Holy Spirit in our life (Gal. 5:22-23). When we try to do things on our own, or manufacture a fake joy or thankfulness, eventually it fizzles out. But true thankfulness and rejoicing that comes from God is what sustains us.

But they cannot be the overriding, controlling issues of a church. We need to practice 1 Thess. 5:18. Think of things to rejoice in, and then do so to the Lord. The word “always” is to help us to remember to stay on track. When things go south, it is easy to not rejoice or be thankful. So we need to constantly have in our minds to be thankful, to be glad, to rejoice in what the Lord has done.

It is being filled with joy, because of our relationship with Christ Who brings us joy. See 1 Thess. 5:16. Joy is not based on circumstances. It is resting in Christ that He has got whatever is going on in our lives and He is walking with us through it and we rejoice in that.

As one commentator notes, and it is so true, the man in prison is writing and telling us to be joyful, which shows that we cannot allow people or situations to dictate our rejoicing or being full of joy.

**Point:** Think of things to rejoice in, to be thankful for. We all can find something.

**3) Some practical advice on handling stress and worry.** This is not to make light of the fact that we do get stressed out, we worry about things. Vss. 5-7 give us some help when we begin to worry about something or to feel overwhelmed, stressed out, you name it.

In vs. 5 Paul, obviously hoping for the return of the Lord in his lifetime (The Lord is at hand can also mean that because of the Holy Spirit, the Lord is among His people), tells us to let our “reasonableness” be known to everyone. What does the word **“reasonableness”** mean? **Thayer** has it as **“equitable, fair, mild, gentle.”** **Mounce** has **“mildness, gentleness.”**

The BKC tells us that the word we are looking at suggests a **“forebearing, nonretaliatory spirit.”** Joy is seen in how we respond to situations and people. Think of the problem that was happening in the Philippian church. How the issue was handled would be noted by believers and those who did not know the Lord. Harshness in our response helps no one. In fact, it just causes more problems.

We don’t retaliate, we show mercy and put others first. That is how our “reasonableness” is seen. Again, this does not mean we get walked on. It means that we take the high road and want unity in the body of Christ, the church.

In vs. 6 Paul begins with reminding us not to be anxious about anything. Worry, stress, fear, overwhelmed, are just a few words that come to mind when we see the word “anxious.” We are to be in no way “anxious.” It is a command to not be anxious. We see that at the beginning with the phrase “do not” which can mean “not at all, in no respect.” We are not to allow things to make us anxious.

I realize that it is not always easy to not worry and fret. But we gain nothing from doing so. Jesus talked about this in Mt. 6. Now, let me define quickly the word “anxious.” **Thayer** has it meaning **“to be troubled with cares.”** Finances, health, relational, cultural, I mean, we, if we focus on the bad stuff, can get anxious and worry and it eats us up. These worries will hinder our walk with God and we must as we are going to see, leave them with Christ.

Now, before going any further on this I want to mention something. I do think there is a “right” place for concern and care. What I mean by that can be seen in what Paul said regarding all the churches that he ministered to and had on his mind. In 2 Cor. 11:28 he talked about the daily pressure caused by his anxiety for the churches that he ministered to.

The word for “anxiety” in 2 Cor. 11:28 has the idea of “caring for something.” We should care about our kids, our friends, our church, but we are not to be overwhelmed with anxiety in a negative sense, stress, and worry. Paul is talking in Phil. 4:6 about debilitating anxiety, care and worry.

In Phil. 2:20 Paul talked about sending Timothy to Philippi because no one would care for the church as well as he would. We are to care for people. We are not to live in worry and stress that makes us not trust God.

Paul says in Phil. 4:6 that instead of worrying and being anxious, we are to give them to God in prayer. We can let Him our needs as well as other’s needs. We are to come to Him in prayer with thanksgiving. That means that as we pray, we thank Him that He is in control, that He knows what is best and what is going on, and we leave it with Him. God is totally aware of our situation and we need to trust Him.

So, we make our needs known, we pray for others, we ask God to help us in the situation that has led to us worrying about things, and we leave it with Him, thanking Him for caring for us. The three words Paul uses regarding bringing things to God (prayer, supplication, requests) overlap.

The word for “prayer” is a general term about talking to God but carries the idea of worship and reverence when we go to God. It is showing Him His proper place in our life. “Supplication” are needs brought before His throne and “requests” is “a thing asked for.” But the key is doing so with thanksgiving, with the right attitude and done with a worshipful heart as we ask for His help.

Vs. 7 tells us what the result will be when we come to the Lord with the right heart. His peace, His comfort, His assurance, His giving us rest in Him, as we give our situation and any requests to God, will “guard” our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, for He is Who we are identified with.

“Hearts and minds” covers our emotions, intellect, will, conscience. These two words speak about our inner person, who we are. Stress and worry affect us physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

When we go to Him in prayer, and are willing to continually do so and let Him respond according to His will, He “guards” or thoughts, our emotions, our actions. The word “guard” comes from a word that was used to describe protection by a military guard. Speaking here in our verse, it means **“to protect by guarding”** because of our connection to Christ. The “in Christ Jesus” is vital here.

We lean on the fact that we belong to Christ, that we are His. **William Mounce** notes that it means **“to keep in a state of settlement or security.”** We can rest in Christ, that He is walking with us in the good times and the bad.

We have to be willing to do what vs. 6 says for vs. 7 to have affect. Worry and fear stop the Lord from guarding our hearts and minds. We start thinking things we should not. We make things up. We freeze in fear of the future and the present. We worry about things that may not have even occurred. We have to be willing to give our stresses to God and thank Him that He knows better than us about what to do.

Humanly speaking, this peace of God goes beyond what we may fully grasp or understand or perceive. When things are tough, we are to pray and lean on God. When taking any requests to Him we are to this, to trust Him, to rely on Him and the peace He gives. We cannot comprehend the amazing peace God gives and it is based on our relationship “in Christ Jesus.” We have peace with God and we have the peace of God.