**Phil. 3:12-4:4 – Letting Go Of The Past And Handling Disunity**

There are people that we encounter, and you may some, who have had things happen in their past that still to this day, controls them. They may be bitter and angry. They may not be able to let go and move forward in their lives. People bring up their past even though the individual has changed. Or something happened to them, and that event still controls them.

There are those who still are controlled by the past when it comes to pleasing people. I know of folks whose parents have passed on who are still trying to please deceased parents because of how they were grounded in the past and what was expected by their folks so that they would be accepted and loved. The past can control our present and future if we are not careful.

As we continue in Philippians, we want to look at what we can learn about how to move forward in our life and not be caught up with the past.

**1) Keys to forgetting our past.** Besides what we have just noted, our spiritual enemy will use the past to get us down. Paul knew his past, all too well. It was thrown at him on more than one occasion.

In **vs. 12** Paul says that his growth, his becoming like Christ has not been obtained or reached its full potential nor had he experienced the resurrection or suffering for Christ. His point: never be satisfied with where we are at spiritually.

Let me explain something, though. This is not to guilt us, or to be legalistic, where we must do this or that to prove our worth to God by following some manmade rules. 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 attained where we want to be.

Paul also reminds us in **vs. 12** to not compare ourselves to others as **Warren Wiersbe** points out. We can always, in my opinion, 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 to be more like Christ is something that we will work on until we are with the Lord. Paul had not yet reached maturity nor had he at some point. He was still in the process of becoming more like Jesus.

The word **“perfect”** according to **Mounce can also mean “to be brought to the goal, to reach the end of one’s course.”** Paul had not gotten there yet so he was focused as this verse shows.

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 says about dealing with the past. We see this in **vss. 13-14** and this is where we will finish this morning. The past, if we do not deal with it, can stop us from growing and maturing in Christ. That is why dealing with it, if necessary, is so important.

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 say that is obvious, how many people, as we mentioned at the start, 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 the past affects 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.

For some, that means that when we have our past come up in conversations or in our mind, things that hurt us or hindered us or that we did to others but have been forgiven, we have to remind ourselves and 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. What you and I must do is choose to let it go and move forward.

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. But, 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.

**Point:** 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. That means reminding ourselves when these things are brought up that we have chosen to move on from the past, to grow in our relationship with God.

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) 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 veer off course or to 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.

Yes, we can learn from the past, but it cannot control us. We know where we must 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) We must 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.

You could say we are in a race. In **2 Tim. 4:7-8** Paul talks about finishing the race, keeping the faith and knows he will be rewarded for doing so. Paul is using a sports metaphor, a picture of a race, to describe our walk with God.

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 but constantly moving forward in our life in Christ. 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.

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 in **vss. 18-19**, that our home is in heaven **(vss. 20-21).**

Now, to **Philippians 4**. In **vs. 1** Paul tells them and us to **“stand firm”** **(persist, persevere)** in the Lord **(Phil. 4:1)**. Note with me **Phil. 4:1-3**.

There is a second point this morning that we must make here in **vss. 2-3**. It is this:

**2) 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 disunity in the church, and it is possible people were taking sides.

There are many churches who try to ignore issues, not confront when needed (because who likes to do that), and they 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 constantly pushed and given can lead 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 must encourage them to face it.

Paul wants them to be 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 and the relationship we have with Him and one another. 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 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 because of a conversation with one of these ladies. There is the thought that they both may have been deaconesses. 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)**.

**How does dealing with situations like this look in practice:** 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 continues, then the person who refused to cooperate and get things right would be confronted and if they still refused, and were causing disunity, brought before the church. This is serious stuff, not something to trifle with. It ruins our testimony before 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, continuing with a thought from last week, Paul tells us to have an attitude of joy and rejoicing.

**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, again, our attitude matters. This is what we need to do. Every one 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.

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”** in **Phil. 4:4** 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.

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. Again, as we mentioned last week, joy is an inner calm that knows that God is in control of our life.

It is being filled with joy, because of our relationship with Christ Who brings us joy. See **1 Thess. 5:16**. Remember, 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.