

Preached on 7/3/22 at GBC - Ruston

"Laying HOLD Of Christ"

Phil.3:12-14

Like **II Cor.5:17**, most well-intentioned, though delusional religious people rip the words of the Apostle to the Philippian believers out of their proper context, seeking to use them to exhort their hearers to greater heights of personal obedience and what they consider “good works”, while at the same time, threatening them with eternal doom if they don’t comply. Maybe you’re thinking: “Pastor you are reading too much into their motives!” **AM I? Here’s the thing:** I have a unique perspective, literally a “bird’s eye view” of their motives and intentions, because before the Lord was pleased to reveal Himself **TO ME** and **IN ME**, I too had the same motives and the same intentions driving everything I believed and taught – “*Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*”(**Rom.10:1-3**) This describes **ALL SINNERS WITHOUT EXCEPTION**, including **ME**, before God gives the gift of faith! Tragically, I can still remember using Paul’s words to those at Corinth to beat myself and all who heard me into submission – “*Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*”(**II Cor.5:17**) I’d use these verses we’re going to look at this morning in the same exact way, implying that unless you are doing everything in your power to lay hold on Christ and cling to Him perfectly every, single, solitary moment of your life, **YOU BETTER EXAMINE YOURSELF** and make certain you aren’t merely a false professor – “*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but [this] one thing [I do], 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.*” Was that the Holy Spirit’s purpose for moving Paul to record these words, to provoke men and women to legal and mercenary obedience? I want us to look at these words this morning in their **PROPER CONTEXT**, in hope and prayer that God the Holy Spirit will be pleased to draw out our hearts to a greater awareness of **WHO** and **WHAT** we are in Christ, and **WHAT** we actually possess in Christ Jesus our Lord!

In order to have a correct understanding of these words expressed concerning Paul’s desire and his experience, we need to know **WHO** he is addressing. These words Paul used, “*not as though I have already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend*”; “*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended*”, are not expressions by the Apostle that his salvation was still in doubt, nor were they meant to cause undue worry or fear in the mind and understanding of those to whom he wrote them. Paul speaks these words concerning himself as one who was eternally secure in Christ Jesus, and the Spirit moved him to write them to those who possessed the same confidence. **Think about how Paul started this letter** – “*Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and [from] the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being*

confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ.”(Phil.1:1-5) In Vs.29 of this chapter, he declares to these same “saints”, (which in the original means ‘holy or separated to God’s service’) – “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” In Phil.2, Paul called on these “saints” (including all saints in every generation) – “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” The word translated “this mind” means ‘to be of the same mind i.e. agreed together, cherish the same views, be harmonious’. **Ask yourself this question:** Was Paul calling on those who by nature are “dead in trespasses and sin”, those “ignorant of the righteousness of Christ and going about to establish their own righteousness”, unregenerate and lost, to be of the same mind, i.e., agreed together, cherishing the same views, and harmonious with Christ? He told those in Corinth – “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? **BUT WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST.**”(I Cor.2:14-16) Consider what he said of him and all God’s redeemed in **Phil.3:3!** Whatever Paul is speaking of in our text is **ONLY** what those who are **JUSTIFIED, SANCTIFIED, and SURE TO BE GLORIFIED** by the accomplished work of the God sent Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ **know and understand** to be their experience – “For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, [Saying], Blessed [are] they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed [is] the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”(Rom.4:1-8) Before we do anything by way of obedience that is acceptable to God, we are already justified, already sanctified, and fully entitled to the whole inheritance of grace. This is a life or death issue when it comes to salvation by grace alone, through Christ alone, by faith alone – “And if by grace, then [is it] no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if [it be] of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”(Rom.11:6) God’s elect are **JUSTIFIED** and **SAVED** based on a work that had no part in producing, a work that have not part in maintaining, a **WORK** done for them by their Substitute, Surety, Savior, and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ – **Quote Acts 13:38,39**

With this **FACT ESTABLISHED**, let’s quickly consider the meaning of Paul’s words in our text this morning – **Vss.12-13ab**. The word Paul used translated “attained” means ‘receive, or to take in the hand or lay hold of’. We know Paul had “received” much by way of his union with Christ. He was perfectly justified, he was sanctified and set apart for God’s used, he was called and installed in the office as the Apostle to the Gentiles, and according to his own words he had excelled beyond all the other Apostles in gifts and graces. Yet Paul humbly states what he knew to be true in his own life in this present fleshly state – “Not as though I had already attained, either were already **PERFECT**.” This word translated “perfect” means ‘to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, bring to an end’. It is the same word Christ spoke on the cross – “**IT IS FINISHED**.” To those at Philippi, and to us as we look at Paul’s life, he exemplified what it means to be a child of God, one redeemed by His grace. But Paul tells all His hearers in every generation what is the present reality of every justified saint while they remain in this body of flesh – “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but [how] to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil

which I would not, that I do.”(Rom.7:18,19) Paul’s words in our text are an admission that his knowledge was imperfect, his faith was at times lacking, and this knowledge drew a constant complaint from him, as well as from all God’s elect – “*O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” By these words Paul freely and fully confessed that after all his attainments in the life of grace, he saw himself to be far short of what he longed to attain. It brings to my mind Christ’s words – “*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*”(Lk.17:10) If we’re “*born of God*”, we know and understand Paul’s experience, because his experience is our own. **I was talking with a dear brother this week, and we discussed this very thing.** At nearly 35 years of “*knowing the Lord*”, or better being “*known of the Lord*”, I see more sinfulness, more unbelief, with more struggles both inward and outward than we I first believed.

So what did Paul do? What are we to do? Throw our hands up in the air and just give up, claiming we can’t do anything? **GOD FORBID!! Listen to Paul** – “*but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.*” **Listen to it from YLT** – “but I pursue, if also I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by the Christ Jesus.” The word translated “*I follow after*” means ‘to press on: figuratively of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal’. I love what Robert Hawker wrote concerning Paul’s words – “Observe the aim of the apostle: all his pursuit, and all his desire was, like an arrow shot at a mark, to apprehend Christ, as Christ had first apprehended him: to grasp Jesus, as the Lord Jesus had held, and did hold him. Happy desire! happy pursuit! and blessed mark of grace! For let the Lord have given out to the soul ever so largely, there is more to give out, more to be received, more to be enjoyed. And the Holy Ghost, **WHO IS LEADING A CHILD OF GOD OUT OF HIMSELF, MORE AND MORE, TO HEAD HIM MORE AND MORE TO THE ENJOYMENT OF JESUS** is sweetly training that precious soul, and advancing him to the highest lessons in the school of grace.”

Look at Vss.13c-14. From Paul’s words here, we as the children of God must learn what the life of God in the soul consists, namely to be always pursuing the person and work of Christ, to enjoy more of what we are and have been made “*in Him*”, **NEVER SATISFIED** with what we already possess, but by God-given faith following the Apostle’s example, seeking to “*press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*” These words are so encouraging and comforting to a sinner justified and saved by God’s grace. The word “*press*” means ‘to persecute or to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing’. Christ used the **SAME WORD** – “*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD.*”(Matt.5:10); “*Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*”(Jn.15:20) Paul used the same word when he wrote to those at Rome – “*What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.*”(Rom.9:30,31) The word in our text translated “*mark*” means ‘the distant mark looked at, the goal or end one has in view’. The word translated “*prize*” means ‘the award to the victor in the games’. What’s the “**PRIZE**”? “**THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD.**” This isn’t some mansion over the hilltop, or a bunch of stars in one’s crown. This isn’t some achievement we will receive if we **FINISH THE RACE.** The **GIFT OF GOD, our prize is Christ.** I can’t help but think of God’s words to Abraham – “*After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I [am] thy shield, [and]*

thy exceeding great reward.”(Gen.15:1) Again, listen to Mr.Hawker’s words on Paul’s declaration – “In short, to make Christ the sum, the substance, the all of every desire; and ever to keep in remembrance, that the more we receive, the more Jesus hath to impart; the more he gives out, the more he is glorified; and, like some rich spring, the oftener we receive from him, the more rich and full he flows: Oh the blessedness of such a state! **WHAT A HEAVEN UPON EARTH WOULD IT BE, IF CLOSELY FOLLOWED!** To be always living upon Jesus, coming to Jesus, thirsting after Jesus; and the more we receive out of him, and of him, to have the soul’s desires after him the more increased by all we enjoy. Precious Lord! grant me this felicity, that, like Paul, I may say, “Not as though I had already attained :” but all my longings are, so to apprehend and hold fast Christ Jesus, as Christ Jesus hath apprehended and doth hold me fast.” I think the words from our **CALL TO WORSHIP** from **Psalm 81** apply – “**I [am] the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.**” We are to diligently use all the means God has given us in order to grow in grace and knowledge of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Paul’s cry is our cry – “**Yea doubtless, and I count all things [but] loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them [but] dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.**”(Phil.3:8-11)

Let me say this in closing: Paul wasn’t teaching salvation by works, and he certainly wasn’t encouraging those at Philippi or us to start looking for **EVIDENCE** of salvation. Our **EVIDENCE** is God’s record which He has clearly revealed to all those who are His – “**He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; [and] he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.**”(I Jn.5:10-13) **DO WE BELIEVE GOD’S RECORD?** May our God give us grace to glorify Him by taking **HIM AT HIS WORD!**