

Pressing on in Christ

Key Verses:
“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.”
—Philippians 3:13,14

Selected Scripture:
Philippians 3:8-14

THE APOSTLE PAUL WAS

one of the most zealous, single-minded individuals recorded in the Bible. He testified to King Agrippa, “All Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, ... that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.” (Acts 26:4,5, *New American Standard Bible*) Defending the only faith he had ever known led Saul, the apostle’s former name, to persecute the followers of Christ.—Acts 7:57-60; 8:1-3

It was this same zeal and strength of conviction, however, that was exhibited by Saul when he saw a vision of Jesus in his resurrected glory on the road to Damascus. His response was honest and instant: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:3-6) His zeal would now enable him to be a “chosen vessel” to bear the name of Jesus before Gentiles, kings, and the Jews.—vs. 15

Upon receiving the Holy Spirit, Paul dedicated himself to serving the Gospel of Christ for the rest of his earthly life. The sentiments of our Key Verse express

the apostle's sole desire to be faithful to his consecration vow. Paul similarly exhorted the brethren in Rome to zeal and faithfulness: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

This process of pressing "toward the mark" and being "transformed" requires leaving earthly things behind. Wealth, position, honor and all other earthly treasures are to be considered of little or no value compared to spiritual things. Paul lost his position of leadership amongst the Jewish community, but it now meant nothing to him. In fact, it resulted in personal suffering at the hands of those he once represented and defended. We should likewise expect to suffer trials of ridicule, even to the point of persecution, if we are standing up for the Truth.—I Pet. 4:12-14

Paul's goal was to "win Christ," and to "know him, and the power of his resurrection." (Phil. 3:8,10) The "mark" he refers to in order to accomplish this can be properly thought of as the sum of all the Christian graces—perfect love. Jesus attained this mark, and set it for us, telling us to love even our enemies, and thus be perfect, or complete, as is our Heavenly Father.—Matt. 5:44-48

The pressing and transforming of ourselves into the image of Jesus is a lifetime work. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) We may be prone to discouragement at times, but our lesson encourages us to keep our eyes fixed on the goal. Paul testified that he did not count himself to have yet attained the "mark for the prize" at this point in his life. Let his witness be an encouragement to us that we can be faithful with the Lord's help. ■