

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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CHRIST

BY

PURSUING

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Living Stream Ministry

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Scripture Reading: Phil. 3:12-14

NOT YET PERFECTED, BUT PURSUING

In [Philippians 3:7-11](#) Paul gives us the way to experience Christ. In [verses 12 through 14](#) Paul applies to himself the things presented in [verses 7 through 11](#). In [verse 12](#) he says, “Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue, if also I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” The Greek word rendered “perfected” also means completed or matured in life. Paul’s meaning here is that he was still growing, for he did not regard himself as one who had reached maturity. If Paul needed to say that he had not already obtained or was not already perfected, even though he had so much growth in life and so much experience of Christ, how much more should we have such an attitude about ourselves!

In [verse 12](#) Paul says, “I pursue, if also I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid

hold of by Christ Jesus.” The Greek word translated “lay hold of” may also be rendered gain, grasp, or get possession of. It may even be rendered seize. For simplicity, we shall use the word gain. Paul aspired to gain that for which he had been gained by Christ Jesus. At the time of his conversion Paul was gained by Christ. Christ had gained Paul with the intention that Paul would gain Him.

Not many Christians speak of their conversion in the way Paul spoke of his. Have you ever heard anyone say that at the time he was converted Christ gained him so that he might gain Christ? We need to realize that Christ has gained us that we might gain Him. Then we need to use Paul’s expression to uplift our conversation about conversion. Christ gained us not merely for the sake of forgiveness, redemption, salvation, or heaven. I repeat, He gained us for the definite purpose that we might gain Him.

Do you realize that you have been gained by Christ? At the time of your conversion, Christ laid hold of you, seized you, grasped you. When you were converted to Christ, He took full possession of you. Now it is impossible for you to escape His grasp. The Lord holds the whole earth in His hands. How do you expect to be able to run away

from Him? The Lord is very patient; He is not easily offended or angered. Sometimes Christians misrepresent the Lord Jesus and give others the impression that He will immediately become angry if they do something wrong. However, the Lord may bear with you quite a long time without becoming angry with you. He is not troubled by your attempts to escape from Him. He knows that once He has gained you, you cannot get away.

When we first called on the name of the Lord Jesus for our salvation, we were “hooked” by the Lord. It is a very important matter to call on the Lord, for when we call on Him, we are gained by Him. Once the Lord has gained us, there is no escaping from Him. Some have testified that they tried to get away from the Lord for many years, but eventually had to return to Him.

The Lord has taken possession of us so that we might take possession of Him. This was His purpose in grasping us. Christ wants us to gain Him. The Lord’s aim in His salvation is to seize us that we might take full possession of Him. Not even when Paul was writing to the Philippians did he regard himself as having gained Christ in a full way. Rather, he was still pursuing Christ in order to gain Him.

In Philippians 3 Paul uses three Greek words that are rendered gained, obtained, and laid hold of. The meaning of these words is very close, for to obtain is to gain, and to gain is to lay hold of. The strongest of these expressions is lay hold of. Christ has laid hold of us that we might lay hold of Him. He has gained us that we might gain Him. Thus, the Christian life is a life of gaining Christ. How much have you gained of Christ? This is a crucial question. We grow in life by gaining Christ. The degree to which we have gained Christ is the degree to which we have grown with Christ. We all need to gain Christ in order to grow in life. Spiritual growth is measured by how much we have gained of Christ.

I hope that the saints will use 3:12 to improve their vocabulary concerning conversion and salvation. According to this verse, conversion means that Christ gains a person so that this person may gain Him. Gaining Christ is a life-long matter. Day by day our goal should be to gain Him. Even during his imprisonment, Paul was pursuing Christ in order to gain Him.

Paul's use of the little word "if" in verse 12 indicates that he was not certain about his growth in life. It is right to be sure of our salvation, but not to be certain of our growth in life. If we have

the assurance that we have grown in life to an advanced degree, we probably have not grown to that extent. We should join Paul in saying, “*If also I may lay hold....*”

In [verses 13 and 14](#) Paul goes on to say, “Brothers, I do not yet reckon myself to have laid hold, but one thing—forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, I pursue toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Even though Paul had experienced and gained Christ tremendously, he did not consider that he had experienced Him in full or gained Him to the uttermost. For this reason he was still advancing toward the goal—the gaining of Christ to the fullest extent.

In [verse 13](#) Paul speaks of forgetting the things behind. In order to gain Christ to the fullest extent, Paul not only forsook his experience in Judaism, but also refused to dwell on his past experiences of Christ and be limited by them. To dwell on our past experiences, no matter how real they may have been, frustrates our further pursuing after Christ.

In [verse 13](#) Paul tells us that he was stretching forward to the things which are before. He knew that Christ is unsearchably rich, that there is a

vast territory of His riches to be possessed. He was stretching forward to gain these riches and to advance further into this territory.

Paul was pursuing toward the goal for the prize. Christ is both the goal and the prize. The goal is the fullest enjoyment and gain of Christ, and the prize is the uttermost enjoyment of Christ in the millennial kingdom as a reward to the victorious runners of the New Testament race. In order to reach the goal for the prize, Paul was exercised to forget the things which are behind and to stretch forward to the things which are before. This is the way to gain Christ by pursuing Him.

Even though Paul was a matured saint and a very experienced apostle, he tells us that he had not already obtained and had not yet been perfected. He did not regard himself as one who had obtained the full enjoyment of Christ or the full maturity in life. He, of course, had obtained the common salvation by the common faith ([1 Tim. 1:14-16](#)), but he was still pursuing Christ in order to gain Him. Furthermore, Paul was also seeking Christ in order to have the extra portion of resurrection. In order to have this portion of resurrection, called the out-resurrection, we must

pursue, run the race, and finish our course triumphantly.

Like Paul, we have been regenerated, but we are not yet perfected, or matured, in life. At the time of our conversion, we were gained by Christ so that we may gain Him. Now as those who have not yet obtained and who have not yet been perfected, we are pursuing Christ.

THE WAY TO PURSUE

The first aspect of the way to pursue Christ is that we do not consider ourselves to have gained. Following this, we need to do one thing: forget the things which are behind and stretch forward to the things which are before.

The goal toward which we are pursuing is the full enjoyment of Christ, and the prize is the extra enjoyment of Christ. I believe this extra portion of the enjoyment of Christ will be in the millennial kingdom. In the millennial kingdom the overcomers will enjoy Christ in an extraordinary way. This extraordinary enjoyment of Christ corresponds to the out-resurrection in [verse 11](#). This out-resurrection can be illustrated by the experience of a few members of a high school graduating class. At the time of graduation, a few outstanding students will enjoy an

extra portion. Although hundreds of students may graduate at the same time, only a small number will enjoy this special portion. In like manner, all believers who die before the Lord comes back will be resurrected, but some will enjoy an extraordinary resurrection, an outstanding resurrection. Paul speaks of this as the out-resurrection from among the dead, a prize to those believers who are successful in running the New Testament race.

Many Christians hold the concept that as long as they are resurrected when the Lord comes back, they will not have any problems. This concept is wrong. The Bible reveals that all unbelievers will be resurrected. According to [John 5:28-29](#), there are two classes of resurrection: the first class is resurrection to life, and the second is resurrection to condemnation. All the believers who have died will be resurrected unto life, that is, unto salvation. However, the unbelievers will be resurrected after the millennium unto condemnation, unto perdition. In light of the principle that there is more than one kind of resurrection, we should not say that simply because a person will be resurrected he will not have any problems. Resurrected believers as well as unbelievers may still face a problem. There will be a

distinction not only between the resurrection of the believers and the unbelievers, but also a distinction among Christians at the time of resurrection. Yes, we shall all be resurrected. But many will participate in resurrection merely in a common way; they will not enjoy the out-resurrection. They will be like the majority of a high school graduating class. Others, however, will enjoy the extra portion of resurrection. They will be like the few out of the graduating class who enjoy an outstanding graduation.

Some Christians may not agree with the interpretation that the goal and the prize in 3:14 are related to the millennial kingdom. But no matter how we interpret this verse, the fact remains that there is a goal for us to reach and a prize for us to gain. I do not insist on my interpretation of this verse, but I would point you to the goal and the prize. In order to reach the goal and gain the prize, you must run in a proper way. Otherwise, you will come short of the goal and fail to receive the prize.

Do not be content with the fact that, as a believer, you will be resurrected. Yes, you will “graduate” in resurrection, but will you have the extra portion of resurrection? Do not be under the influence of the teaching popular with

Christians today that all believers will be kings in the millennium. All true believers are eternally saved. However, not all Christians will be on the same level as far as reward is concerned. The time Christ comes back will be the time of reward. Whether or not we receive a reward from Him depends on how we run the race today.

THE GOAL FOR THE PRIZE OF THE HIGH CALLING

We have pointed out that the goal is the full enjoyment and gain of Christ and that the prize will be the uttermost enjoyment of Christ in the millennial kingdom as a reward to the victorious runners of the New Testament race. This prize is the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. The Greek word rendered high means above. The high calling is the calling by God from above, from the heavens. It is a heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1), corresponding to the heavenly citizenship in [verse 20](#), not an earthly one like that given to the children of Israel in the flesh. This high calling is to take possession of Christ, whereas the earthly calling to the children of Israel was to take possession of a physical land.

We have received not an earthly calling, but

a high calling, a heavenly calling. God has called us to gain Christ as our real land. In typology, God called Israel with an earthly calling to gain the good land. Now God has called us with a heavenly calling to gain Christ.

Once again I wish to emphasize that we need to take care of certain facts in [3:14](#). No matter how we may interpret Paul's word concerning the goal and the prize, we cannot deny that both are facts with certain points. Even if you do not agree with the interpretation that the prize is the top enjoyment of Christ in the millennial kingdom, you still need to take care of the fact that there is a prize for you to obtain. To receive the prize we must reach the goal, and to reach the goal we must run the race. These facts are of great importance.

As we consider these facts, we need to apply them to our situation according to the context of [Philippians 3](#). In this chapter Paul shows us our need to gain Christ. Christ is the goal and also the prize. Do not be distracted by the effort to understand just what kind of prize you will obtain when you reach the goal. What is crucial is that you realize that, according to the divine revelation, God has set forth Christ as your goal

and prize. Furthermore, He has called you to stretch forth toward the goal.

Some Christians may argue that the prize in 3:14 does not refer to enjoyment in the millennial kingdom. Again I say, even if you disagree with this interpretation, you cannot avoid the fact that God does have a prize for us. According to the context of [Philippians 3](#), both the goal and the prize are Christ. Otherwise, why would Paul say that Christ had gained him so that he might gain Christ? In [verse 12](#) he says, “I pursue, if also I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” Then in [verses 13 and 14](#) he continues, “Brothers, I do not yet reckon myself to have laid hold, but one thing—forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, I pursue toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” I urge you to care for the fact that God has set up a goal and prepared a prize. I also urge you to care for the need to run a good race and to pursue Christ by forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forth to the things which are before. I believe that the things which are before are things concerning Christ and His Body, the church. Let us all forget the things

behind and pay attention to the bright future ahead of us, a future of gaining Christ and experiencing Him to the uttermost in His Body.

We should not be satisfied simply with Bible knowledge, not even with the knowledge of [Philippians 3](#). We need to have the actual pursuing of Christ. The Greek word for pursue can also be translated persecute. Before Paul was saved, he was persecuting Christ in a negative way. After he was saved, he pursued Christ to such an extent we may even say he persecuted Christ, but in a very positive way. To persecute a person is to trouble him and refuse to let him go. Before Paul was saved, he bothered Christ and would not let Him go, persecuting Him negatively. But after he was saved and had been gained by Christ, he still persecuted Him, but positively, for he refused to let Christ go. We also should persecute Christ in this way. This is to pursue Christ in order to gain Him. Do not let Christ go. Bother Him, persecute Him, in order to gain Him. To persecute Christ in this way is exhausting. As we persecute Christ, we should spend ourselves completely. Our whole being with all of our strength should be consumed in pursuing Christ. I hope that many will be impressed with the need to pursue Christ and be stirred up to

seek Him even in a persecuting way. Do not allow Christ to get away from you, but seek Him, pursue Him, persecute Him in such a positive way. Then you will gain Him.

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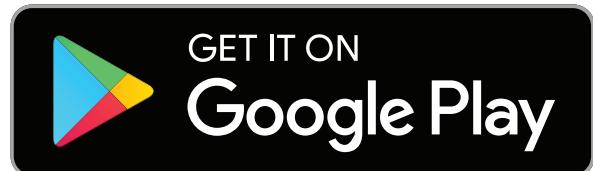
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