

Philippians 3:12, 13
“FORGET THE PAST”

In this chapter Paul speaks a lot about adopting a new perspective and letting go of the old perspective in order to accomplish one's goals.

He calls us not to live in the past, or to get bogged down in the memories of past achievements.

Rather he calls us to let go of anything that might prevent us from embracing our new life and living successfully in the present.

Sometimes, when we find ourselves in new and different situations, the memory of the past holds us back from embracing the new conditions where we find ourselves.

This causes confusion in our minds as we try to live in two different worlds at the same time.

Sometimes we have to let go of something in order to embrace something else.

Paul is a man who knew a thing or two about letting go of the past. And he was the kind of man who had to reinvent himself.

Before he knew Christ he was a successful, influential person. As a Pharisee who was well trained in his religion and who was highly respected, he was deeply integrated into his old identity.

But when Christ grabbed a hold of him he had to let go of his old identity. He had to become something totally different. He had to do this in a way that many of us don't.

He had to become someone totally different in order to become effective in his new assignment. He had to forget what was precious to him before, and to put on a totally new set of ideals, practices and beliefs.

Here, he is speaking of what he has had to do in order to become a new man. In this, he has much to tell us that could be useful to us.

We live in a culture that is extremely dynamic. We are exposed to all kinds of changes all the time.

We move from one place to the other. We change jobs frequently. Sometimes people get married more than once. We attend different churches. Sometimes we marry people from different cultures. Many times we have to live in a different culture. Many of us suffer from traumas of the past.

These and many other things make it necessary for us to be flexible, and to let go of all these things in order to embrace new things, and to be able to function well in radically different situations and environments.

This idea, then, of forgetting the past and taking hold of what we have ahead of us is very important.

What this passage is talking about is letting go of *anything* that prevents us from embracing our Christian identity.

We have to let go of old habits and practices that prevent us from embracing the holiness and the new practices that our Christian faith demands from us.

Certainly we cannot continue living the way we used to live before we knew Christ.

It also means that we have to **let go of cherished beliefs** that we had before. We have to change **the way we think**, our **old world view**, and adopt a new way of looking at the world.

So, for example, we cannot continue thinking of morality and social justice the same way that the world thinks about it. The Bible has different ways of processing these things. There are many people in the church who still have a worldly way of looking at these issues.

They have allowed themselves to be contaminated by the way the world thinks, and therefore they are not able to begin thinking like true Christians.

They spend most of their time reading books and consuming media that is very secular, and they don't realize that their mind is being contaminated by the way the world thinks. So this prevents them from becoming truly Christian in the way they think and process culture and life.

I believe this is a big problem in our time, and it complicates congregational life tremendously. These days, churches are full of people who think they are biblical, conservative Christians, but who think like rationalistic liberals.

You cannot have your cake and eat it too. We have to be consistent. We cannot live in two worlds at the same time. We have to let go of one and embrace the other, especially when these two worlds are so mutually exclusive in many ways.

Romans 12:2

2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

It's good sometimes to stop to think about how we are trying to live in two worlds simultaneously and reflect on specifically how we are doing this. Sometimes we do these things automatically and we don't take time to break them down and understand the process better.

So, Paul is saying that he has actively “forgotten” all those things that he thought were important, and he has trained himself to think about his past differently, in order to embrace the future that Christ has for him. You can also see this better in **verses 7 to 11.**

The Bible is very radical about this idea of forgetting what lies behind and embracing what lies ahead.

Here, Paul is suggesting **the image of a runner**, who cannot afford to be looking back all the time at his competitors, because this would distract him from the goal that lies ahead. This runner needs to concentrate on the goal, the prize that lies ahead.

The bible is so radical about embracing the new life that it speaks of this in terms of dying. We have to die to the old ways and embrace a totally new identity. Its a radical conception.

The Bible speaks about **this need to concentrate completely on what lies ahead**, or on whatever inspires us and strengthens our Christian resolve, in order to run the Christian race successfully.

We need determination, we need a sense of urgency, we need total resolve.

Many Christians do not make progress in their spiritual walk because **they don't have that sense of urgency.**

They haven't come to the point where they despair of themselves, where **they have come to hate** where they find themselves in the now, having acquired this urgent need to enter into the new life that Christ calls them to, to hate their past or their present sinful condition.

Until we get to that **sense of desperation and total concentration**, we cannot really break through into the new level.

Hebrews 12

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, **let us throw off everything that hinders** and the sin that so easily entangles. And **let us run with perseverance** the race marked out for us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus,**

the pioneer and perfecter of faith. **For the joy set before him he endured** the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 Consider him (*analogizomai*) who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

**End of first sermon on January 30, 2022
(Part 2?)**

Consider the past achievements as garbage.

Paul speaks of considering all the positive things that he had achieved or acquired before knowing Christ as **garbage**.

All that he considered worthy, that gave him a sense of self importance, he has thrown away in order to embrace the new values of the Gospel.

One of the things that Paul needed to forget was **the sins of the past**.

We must clarify that by “forgetting” **he did not mean literally *not remembering* the past**. This is an

important distinction to make, and I'll come back to that in a moment.

Paul had persecuted Christians. He had hated Christ and his followers. He had been present when **Stephen was being stoned**, and he helped those that were killing him by holding their clothing and approving what they were doing.

So, **he needed to forgive himself** and to remind himself that Jesus had already forgiven him.

He had to **let go of the moral burden** that that action and its memory carried for him.

Sometimes, **we cannot embrace our new identity as believers**, or go on with what God has for us **because our past sins and mistakes haunt us.**

Guilt torments us, and we feel we are not pleasing to God. So this bogs us down, and prevents us from enjoying our new Christian life and from serving God effectively.

It poisons our present. **Guilty thoughts pursue us all the time.**

We feel that, somehow, **because of the magnitude of our sins**, God probably has not forgiven us. And

if we do not feel forgiven, then **we also feel that we should not be blessed.**

We have a **hard time believing that we too can enter into the blessings** that the Bible promises for those who follow Christ.

We feel **pursued by a legacy of failure** and punishment.

Sometimes there is a **pervading sadness** that comes from sufferings and traumas of our past **family life or failures** we have experienced in the past.

This **holds us back** from pursuing a life of creativity and achievement because we feel we are doomed to fail.

This is so, especially if we see **the evidence of our past sins** wherever we look.

We have all kinds of voices that will accuse us continually.

People around us will sometimes accuse us, at times even our loved ones.

The devil, the great accuser, will find ways to **infiltrate our thoughts**, or to create circumstances or send people our way, who will accuse us and remind us of our past.

And, of course, **we ourselves will often accuse ourselves** continually, and refuse to forgive ourselves, because we feel that if we do, we are giving ourselves a pass.

This is where we have to **remind ourselves continually that God has indeed forgiven us**, that there is nothing that we can do that he cannot forgive if we repent of our sins.

Romans 8:33

33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

The truth is, though, that we have to **be realistic about this**.

We will never get amnesia and simply forget about our past sins. Sooner or later **they will come back** to haunt us.

So **we must resolve to confront this temptation** over and over again. We must take this fact into account as we live out our lives.

This is a **stronghold that must be vanquished** over the course of time.

We need to cooperate with the process, and when those guilty thoughts come into our mind, we must refuse to dwell on them and gently set them aside.

We must **counter them with scriptures** that remind us of our being forgiven. We must **dwell on the positive**, hope inducing aspects of the gospel.

We must **confess with our mouth our state of being forgiven**. We must identify this simply as a condition of our life, and design a regimen, **a set of practices**, that will come into play when we are pursued by these thoughts.

We have to stay **tethered to the Word**. We need **good conversations**. We need **good Christian friends** to encourage us and to help us cement our new identity.

This is what I wanted to say earlier. **We will never completely forget all the things of the past.**

Past pleasures and indulgences will come back to haunt our minds and to tempt us to follow the old ways.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things

Past transgressions and guilt will continue to pursue us until the day we die.

The sooner we get used to this, the more effective we will be in fighting these temptations. **If we try to deny them**, this will only make our struggle more difficult.

We have to be **realistic**. Just by accepting this fact, I believe that it will make it easier to bear the burden.

We must **renounce romantic spirituality** and **superficial pentecostal theology** and acknowledge the complexity of this process.

The world is a sad, fallen place. Until we die, we will continue to struggle against these things.

But, as Paul himself says, **I can do all things in Christ** who strengthens me. We will never completely overcome these temptations. We will never completely forget, in the literal sense of the word.

But by **dwelling on all the positive things** of the gospel; by **determining to continue** the Christian journey no matter what happens, by continually **reminding ourselves that we are forgiven**, and that in **the power of the Holy Spirit** we can overcome, this will help us in our Christian journey.

Indeed, we must remember that we cannot overcome the temptation to dwell on the past **overnight**. It usually **takes a long time**.

It takes a **reprogramming of our brain** and our mental habits. **We must be patient**, and we must persist.

We must be **gentle with ourselves**. **Self condemnation never did anybody any good**.

On the contrary, it discourages us and prevents us from growing in the Lord.

We **cannot lose heart** when we are pestered by the thoughts of the past. But just dwelling on the fact that **in Christ we are accepted, loved,** and forgiven, this should give us fuel to continue running the race.

Another important consideration:

It's important to remember **the role that we play in supporting each other.** We are called to encourage each other. We **must affirm others** in their desire to enter into the new identity.

We have to **become encouragers.** We have to become **a community of people** who **will readily forgive others,** and will remind others that they are also forgiven.

We must **commit to each other for the long run,** knowing that transformation and sanctification will generally take a long time.

Anytime we can **put in a good word that instills hope** or affirmation in one of our brothers or sisters, or even people outside the community, we must take advantage of the opportunity.

There's **a lot of brokenness in the world right now**. Many people dealing with the mistakes of the past. We must each become supporters of each other.

2 corinthians 1:3,4

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, **so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.***

Galatians 6

6 1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who **are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**

How to overcome strongholds of the mind and persistent sins. (Part 3?)

Name your giant

Write down the vision/goal

Commit to it in prayer

Share the goal with others. Declare it.

Commit for the long haul

Maintain long term vision and persistence

Some journeys will take a lifetime and never be fully completed.

Break down the vision into its smaller, component parts

Begin with what you have at hand, the low lying fruit

Pray continually for victory. Specifically.

If you fail, continue trying. Don't give up!

Do not condemn yourself when you fail.

Don't become anxious about your goals. Relax and enjoy the journey.

Understand about the rewiring of the brain and its plasticity. The renewing of the mind is not only spiritual, but also neurological. *It inevitably takes time!*

Understand that if you perform certain actions persistently, it will inevitably produce a result, either for good or for evil. This is a neurological reality.

This should encourage us to persist, but also discourage us from reinforcing bad habits and practices, and reinforcing the practices that lead to spiritual wholeness.

(See about behavior modification and behavioral psychology.)

