

Follow Hard after Christ
Sermon delivered on January 3rd, 2016

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Scripture Text: [Philippians 3:1-14](#)

Introduction

Vladimir Lenin founder the Russian Communist Party, has been regarded as the greatest revolutionary leader and thinker since Carl Marx. A colleague once said of him, "*Lenin thinks about nothing but revolution. He talks about nothing but revolution. He eats and drinks revolution. And if he dreams at night, he must dream about revolution.*"

Though we strongly disapprove and denounce Lenin's ideals and all the evil that came from it, we cannot help but admit that his single-minded passion not only helped him accomplish his goals but affected the entire course of history.

This single minded focus is necessary in life. Totally focused people succeed in life. It is true in the world of sports, Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant did not become the great basketball players as they were, by accident. Both of these men have single-minded passion to play basketball. These men lived, and breathed and ate and drank and spoke and dreamed at night one thing - BASKETBALL.

In our text we see another person who has changed the world because of his single-minded passion. I am talking about the Apostle Paul. Paul was a man of one thing. Paul was a man of single purpose. He had one aim and one ambition.

[13: Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: **but this one thing I do, ...**](#)

Because of this single-minded passion in life, he had greatly affected history and greatly impacted many lives. And even today, although Paul is long dead, he still speaks to us through his recorded letters, and by his example of life and faith.

What is Paul's single-minded passion?

[Philippians 3:8: 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**, 9: 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: 10: **That I may know him**, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11: If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. 12: 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. 13: Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: **but this one thing I do**, for-](#)

getting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14: **I press toward the mark** for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Here is a man who lives, and breathes and eats and drinks and speaks and dreams at night - **Jesus Christ!**

Philippians 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul has a one single passion in life. And what was his goal? Paul's goal in life is CHRIST! The prize is Christ. The goal is to know Him. He is the author, finisher and the subject of our faith. We follow hard after Christ in order to know Him more. Such desire and pursuit proves that we have experienced His true saving grace.

Matthew Henry said, "*Those who think they have grace enough give proof that they have little enough, or rather that they have none at all; because, wherever there is true grace, there is a desire of more grace, and a pressing towards the perfection of grace.*"

The evidence that you have experience grace is that you want more and more grace. The evidence that you got hold of Christ is that you press on toward Christ! **Continued indifference to Christ and His word is an sign of being without Christ.**

Though Paul already has Jesus through faith, he still “presses on” towards Him. **He got hold of Jesus, that's why he is pressing on!**

14: **I press toward the mark** for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Christ is his prize. Christ is his pursuit. Christ is his passion!

What about us, what is our single-minded passion?.

Is our passion Jesus Christ? Is it sports, football, sports celebrity, movie star, hobby, toy, car, house, career, business, job? What fills us with enthusiasm, focuses our energies, and commands the untiring investment of our time and thought and money? In light of what God says has eternal significance, **what value does our passion really possess?**

I want to be like Paul. I want to pursue a **worthy goal**. I want to have a passion that **has eternal value** and that will last for eternity.

Paul allows us see what his passion was - He follows hard after Christ. He follows hard to know Jesus Christ, to trust Him, to love Him, and to serve Him - that is a passion with eternal value.

Dr. Torrey M. Johnson, one of the founders of Youth for Christ said ...
"*Son, find that one thing you do that God blesses, and stick with it!*"

Having found a worthy passion, how would we accomplish it? Let us listen to Paul telling us what he did to pursue his passion. So the words of my text may suggest appropriate thoughts on this first Sunday of 2016.

I - Forget what's behind

13: Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind**, (forgetting the past) and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

As Paul pursues his passion, he said, he forgets those things which are behind, that is, he deliberately and intentionally forgets the past.

What does it mean to forget the past?

It is impossible to forget the past because God gave us a memory so that we can remember things in the past.

There is a time and place for looking back. Paul did it, he has just recalled some of these things in ...

1 Timothy 1:12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; 13: Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14: And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

When we look back it should remind us of where God has brought us from and to keep things in perspective today.

I believe what Paul meant by forgetting the past is not to allow things in the past to stop him nor hinder him from pursuing his passion. He is saying, "*Do not allow the past to hold you in bondage. Do not be a prisoner of your past.*"

What past?

1. Past failures

Forget the past. Do not let the past failures stop you from pressing on. Learn from the past and move on.

Henry Ford understood the importance of moving past our failures. He said that **failure** is the "*opportunity to begin again, more intelligently.*"

2. Past hurts and disappointments

Do not dwell upon hurts, failures, disappointments, etc.

3. Past successes

Philippians 3:3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. 4: Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5: Cir-

circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6: Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7: But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Heritage, accomplishments, attainments and achievements – must not stop us from pressing on.

Philippians 3:12 **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.

Both the accomplishments and failures must be put in its place.

So the point is not: never look back. The point is: do not live in the past. **We may visit there, but don't stay and live in the past**, because to live there is to be paralyzed and to hinder us from pursuing our passion.

If there were past **accomplishments, thank Him**. If there were **failures, humbly confess** them and learn from them. *Never let a dark past cloud a bright future.*

A well-known preacher in the 1800s, Henry Ward Beecher, said this at the beginning of a new year:

"We have passed through one more year. One more long stage in the journey of life, with its ascents and descents and dust and mud and rocks and thorns and burdens that wear the shoulders, is done. The old year is dead. Roll it away. Let it go. God, in His providence, has brought us out of it. It is gone; . . . its evil is gone; its good remains. The evil has perished, and the good survives."

Learn from the past and forget it. Focus on the future and charge it. You cannot successfully focus on the future until you have learned from the past.

II - Reach forth to what's ahead

13: Brethren, (brothers and sisters) 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**, 14: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul gives us a picture of a runner reaching forward, stretching forward, as he approaches the finish line. The runner increases his speed, throws himself forward. His head, shoulders and chest are bent forward. His eye is fixed on the tape at the end of the race, determined to be the first one across the finish line.

That is how the Christian should be; always throwing himself forward after something more than he has yet reached, not satisfied with the rate at which his attainments. He always desire to advance.

Paul looked back and was able to learn from his mistakes, failures and sins; **but most of his life was not spent looking back.** He spend most of his life looking ahead.

Closing Appeals

How about us? Do you have the focused attention that Paul is describing in these texts? What is your passion in life? What motivates you? Where do you invest your time and energy and talent?

Do you follow hard after Christ? Do you follow hard to know Him, to trust Him, to love Him, and to serve Him? Do you follow hard to know His will and to do His will?

I urge you, follow hard after Christ!

8: 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,** 9: 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: 10: **That I may know him,** and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11: If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. 12: 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. 13: 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, 14: **I press toward the mark** for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Amen!