

KEEP GOING!

Philippians 3:12-4:1

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Born in A.D. 1515, Teresa of Avila, calling herself Teresa of Jesus, became a nun at the age of sixteen. Little by little she sought new depths of contemplation and at age forty experienced a trance in which, for the first time, she had a vision of Christ. She went on to become the founder of a reformed Carmelite order. Teresa was a model of rigorous discipline, and her books on the mystical way brought her the title Doctor (that is, teacher) of the Church. Her saintliness and miracles reported to have been done by her led to her canonization in A.D. 1622, only forty years after her death.

Perhaps you are wondering why I have told you about Teresa of Avila. This story may be new to many of you, and many of you may not believe parts of it. I wanted to provide some background for a quote that may not be new to many of you. For it was Teresa of Avila who said:

Christ has no body on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.

When the Apostle Paul declares that "Christ Jesus has made me his own," he describes a task that is both a privilege and a responsibility. And the words of Teresa of Avila express this task very well. We are Christ's own: we are His body, His eyes, His feet, and His hands. When Lord Macleod of Iona, who worked first in the Glasgow slums and then built up the Christian community on Iona, was asked, "What makes you tick?" He promptly answered, "The fact that Christ Jesus made me his own."

To the church of Philippi, Paul penned these words:

^{3:12}Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶Only let

us live up to what we have already attained.

¹⁷Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

^{4:1}Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! (TNIV).

In 1954, in Vancouver, British Columbia, the famous “miracle mile” run took place. It was the first time two milers ran under four minutes in the same race: Roger Bannister and John Landy. Landy had led all the way, but coming off the final turn toward the finish line he looked over his shoulder to find out where Bannister was, only to be passed on the other side and beaten to the wire. The picture of that event may be all the commentary we need on Paul’s imagery of running the Christian race.

For Paul, his whole Christian life has been one thing—the pursuit of Christ. Like a disciplined, dedicated runner, Paul pays no attention to anything that might slow him down as he strains and stretches for the finish line. The goal of Paul’s pursuit is God’s consummation of things; the prize is Christ, which means the final realization of knowing Him.

Although Paul’s focus is altogether on the heavenly prize, his running shoes are planted firmly on the ground. In other words, Paul has something to say about “where the rubber meets the road.” He offers two applications.

First, the mind of Christ. “All of us, then, who are mature *should take such a view of things*” (v. 15, TNIV). “Let those of us then who are mature *be of the same mind*” (v. 15, NRSV). WWJD—What would Jesus do? That is a popular question today raised by Christians. It is a good question, but there is another question that must be answered first—What would Jesus think? Earlier, in chapter 2 of his letter to the Philippians, Paul powerfully portrays the mind of Christ. In verse 2, he calls on the Philippians *twice* to be of “one mind,” and in verse 5 he states, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” In 2:2, 2:5, and 3:15 Paul is using the same Greek word (φρονέω—*phroneō*) to describe an attitude that has its origins in the attitude of Christ Himself. When Paul calls

the Philippian Christians to be “like-minded” or to be of “one mind” or to “take the same view of things,” he is calling them to think like Jesus, to possess the mind of Christ. Taking the same view of things or being like-minded does not mean that we agree on doctrinal issues. However, this is usually how these verses are misused. The unity and uniformity of thinking that Paul urges is the unity and uniformity of mind that comes from everyone thinking like Christ. And when everyone thinks like Christ, then no one thinks of themselves. Whether you agree with me or I agree with you is not the point; the point is that we both agree to think like Christ, which means we treat one another like Christ has treated us. The ability to love others as Jesus loves us comes from first adopting the mind of Christ. How I treat those who think differently from me demonstrates if I am thinking like Christ. How I behave betrays what I believe.

Having reflected on what Jesus would think, we are now ready to ask what Jesus would do. This brings us to Paul’s second application: *the example of Christ*. “Be imitators *of me*” or “Be imitators *with me*” (v. 17). However we translate verse 17, it is clear that what Paul is ultimately calling for is that the Philippian Christians imitate him as he imitates Christ. There is, then, an implicit command to imitate Christ. Paul’s logic is very similar to 1 Cor 11:1, where he urges the Corinthians: “Be imitators of me, as I am Christ!” As a body of Christians, it is not enough to declare to the outside world that they must follow Jesus; we must also demonstrate to the outside world that we follow Jesus. It is only when we are a church *like* Christ that we are a church *of* Christ. I realize that we will never practice perfectly what we preach; but others must see that the preaching to which we hold them accountable is also the preaching to which we hold ourselves accountable. We take the medicine we prescribe.

To the Christians living in the Roman colony of Philippi, Paul describes them as being a colony of heaven. *That is what it means to be the church: it means we are to be a colony of heaven while living presently in the city of Plymouth.* Paul’s picture is not that of our being taken to heaven; his picture is of heaven being brought to earth. And as our minds and lives are presently being transformed into the likeness of Christ, we anxiously anticipate the transformation of our bodies into the likeness of His glorious body.

The Churches of Christ in America are the descendants of a historical happening known as the Restoration Movement. The Restoration Movement was a call to restore

the church of the New Testament by following scripture and scripture alone. It was a call to be Christians only, not the only Christians. It was a call to lay aside the dividing traditions of men and follow the uniting word of God. It was a call to bring all Christians together for the sake of taking the gospel to the world. It was, and still is, a noble vision.

For those of us who are children of the Restoration Movement, I urge us not to forsake the dream. I also urge us to remember that it is a *movement*. Restoration is an ongoing process, a never-ending journey, a continual pressing forward to know Christ. Like Paul, I want to know Christ. And like Paul, I realize that I will never fully know Christ in this life. But I intend to keep running the race, inspired by the hope that one day I shall receive the prize—Jesus Christ Himself.

Like many of you, I am a Christian. At our baptism, we were marked with the sign of the cross. To be marked with the sign of the cross implies an obligation to be conformed to the likeness of the One who hung on the cross—Jesus Christ. We are a marked people—marked to think as He thought, to live as He lived, to love as He loved, and to be prepared to accept the consequences. Like Paul, we believe that if we are like Christ in our lives and in our deaths, that we will be like Him in our resurrection. Because Christ was willing to share our human life, He enables us to share His resurrection life, and He will one day make us truly like Him.

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