

# Paul - the Christ Driven Life

**By Derrick Harrison**

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**TAKING CHRIST'S WORD TO THE NATIONS**

## PAUL: THE CHRIST DRIVEN LIFE

*"I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil.3:14).*

This verse captures the overriding motivation of the apostle Paul. We are not talking about mission here; although it would be true to say that Paul was equally driven by his passion for souls. Here Paul is revealing the passion of his heart for Christ. Before we focus our attention on this verse we must first make clear exactly what Paul is doing here because it is the only place in his entire writings that he opens the door of his inner experience and shows us what "makes a man tick." This chapter is autobiographical (one also includes Rom.Ch.7 which I believe is autobiographical in that Paul is recounting his former experience under the servitude of the Law). Actually Rom.Ch.7 requires further consideration in the light of this chapter. Other autobiographical material in Acts Ch.20 and 1 & 2 Corinthians refers to his apostolic labours. Paul relates his confrontation with Jesus on the Damascus Road on two occasions (Acts Ch.22 and Ch.26; these are recorded by Luke who also describes Paul's actual meeting Jesus and the events which followed (Ch.9).

Supposing that you take up one of the package tour deals in "The Times" newspaper and visit London, one of the places you must visit is "Big Ben" the famous clock adjoining the Houses of Parliament. Because you are an important visitor you have gained special permission to see the great clock from the inside. You climb hundreds of steps until you eventually reach the very heart of the clocks mechanisms. You see the great wheels and gears and the springs and rods that guarantee that the hands of the clock move round the face in perfect time and co-ordination as they have for hundreds of years. People only see Big Ben from the outside, they read the time of day and they do not enquire how the clock ticks. Paul opens the door to his inner heart and shows us how he ticks on the inside. This is called by Watchman Nee the "normal Christian life."

This raises a wider issue regarding the apostle who believed that God had chosen him to be a model for others to follow. He urged Christians so many times to follow him that we cannot ignore this. You may have some questions about the wisdom of following a man, even when we are talking about the apostle Paul, but the fact is

that Paul urged his converts to follow him! Now if he had said this about Jesus we would have had no problems with the instruction. Jesus did call men and women to follow Him. Over and over again we hear Him calling men to Himself; even the rich young ruler was called by Jesus to follow Him. It is the greatest privilege of my life to be personally called by Jesus Christ. When you follow Him you are following the One who is truly a man in the context of His humanity but He is the **Son of God** in the context of His divine nature, so that there are certain ways in which He is not a model for us when it comes to following. We cannot follow Him in His deity. In contrast Paul was a human person like us and that is why we probably have some reserves about following him. My suggestion is that you carefully examine each Scripture where Paul instructs his converts to follow him so that you can come to a correct understanding of what he means, and see where we can properly follow the apostle. Read the following Scriptures: **1Cor.4:15-17; 11:1; Gal.4:12; 1Thess.1:6; 2Thess. 3:9; Phil. 3:17; 1Tim.1:16.**

We are not going to follow this line of study, but I have raised this matter of Paul being a model for Christians to follow because it is relevant to our subject. May we say that Paul is a model for us in his inner experience as he describes it here? Are there foundational aspects of his experience that are necessary ingredients of a genuine Christian experience? I believe the answer to that is yes. In this chapter Paul urges the Philippians to follow him,

*“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (Phil.3:17).*

And again in the next chapter Paul says,

*“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil.4:9).*

It is clear that Paul opened the door to his inner heart for the purpose of showing us how we also should be towards Christ. This is not a theory but passion; we do not find here a manual or text book on the A, B, and C of spirituality but a dynamic account of Paul’s experience of Christ that is very radical in its core values. I would also say that these verses are not written *firstly* with a theological intent although

they display an experimental Christology - Christ at the centre of his life, past present and future. He also presents the three fundamental categories of salvation, describing (1) those who have been **justified** "by the righteousness of God, which is by faith" (v9), (2) those who are **sanctified** (experiencing the resurrection power of Jesus as well as participating in His sufferings) (v10), and (3) those who are **glorified** who "attain to the resurrection of the dead" (v11). These three fundamental elements of salvation represent the past, present and future, we have been justified by God, we are being sanctified by the power of the risen Christ and we will be raised in glory at the return of Jesus. Each requires further exposition which Paul does not give at this point. For a full exposition of these verses I refer you to my website and the article entitled "Follow me as I follow Christ." (Simply type in my name in Google and it will lead you to the site) I am asking you to read to this pamphlet on the website because in this brief article it is impossible give an adequate lead up to verse fourteen.

And now to an examination of Paul's statement in Phil.3:14, "*I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" This dynamic thrust forwards has already been expressed in v12, 13 and 14. This forward thrust is emphasised and developed by the race metaphor: I do not look back into my past experiences; I strain forward with all my determination so that I can win the race. This is the momentum and drive of his heart and life in response to the call of God. Recognizing this forward movement one must ask: what is the goal of such energetic motivation? Part of that thrust means that he discards those things of the past for those things that lie immanent in view before him. What is it that he sees so clearly? What is this prize for which he aims? He describes it as the culmination of the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus." To answer this question one must always look in the immediate context in which Paul is speaking; in other words the immediate context will always explain the meaning of a verse. Only when you have found the full and correct meaning of a sentence from its context can you begin to source other references on the same subject or theme.

Paul has been speaking in the immediate context about *perfection*. In his former days in Judaism he had described that he was "blameless" regarding the requirements of the Law (v6). In vv10-11 he describes the very heart of his experience – the desire to know Christ and to know the power of His resurrection and to be conformed to His death by fellowship in His sufferings. The last point is

not generally on the Christian's "shopping list" of important items to purchase! Paul then admits that he has *not* attained to the completion of these goals, "*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected, but I **pursue**, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me*" (v12). We agree that we may not yet be the finished article but nevertheless we are undaunted in our pursuit of holiness and immortality. In our new birth experience holiness is begun and in our continuing walk in communion with God holiness is realized and in our consummation with Christ holiness is ultimately perfected.

Paul says in 1:23, "*For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.*" The heart of the true child of God instinctively reaches forwards into Christ who dwells in eternity. The life of heaven has already begun in the heart of the Christian. Our treasure is in heaven hence our desires naturally focus there. We also know Jesus in our hearts so the lure of His presence urges us forwards to possess Him. The great apostle aptly expresses his very own heart position as to the present and the as yet unrealized desires to be with Christ in eternity which is the perfection referred to in v12. Let me give to you the second half Paul's statement as he describes his dilemma, "*Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you*" (v24). The dilemma was resolved by Paul by a very pragmatic approach to the practical needs of the church at Philippi.

The goal is for ultimate completion of salvation/sanctification/glorification in Christ. Paul knows very well that this is not attainable in this life, because he says so in this verse. Nevertheless, he says that we have already attained in some measure towards our goal (v16). The call of God is the first attainment that sets our feet walking in the ways of God, the indwelling Holy Spirit imparting the life of Christ to us. Experimentally the life of the Spirit is motivating and moving us forwards in our pursuit of holiness and ministry in the power of Christ's resurrection. The inward moving of God's Spirit stretch us beyond our present experience and causes us to take hold of eternal realities which Christ has already obtained for us in His death. In Christ the image of God is in process of complete restoration. This restoration began in us when the divine calling placed us in Christ and proceeds to grow in us by the dynamic resurrection life of Christ. The attainment of

completeness/perfection depends entirely on the purposeful drive of the divine life  
in pursuit of the goal that so motivated the apostle. Derrick Harrison

***My goal is God Himself, not joy nor peace;  
Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God.  
'Tis His to lead me there, not mine but His...  
At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.***

*So faith bounds forward to its goal in God,  
and love can trust her Lord to lead her there.  
Upheld by Him, my soul is foll'wing hard,  
Till God hath full fulfilled my deepest prayer.*

*No matter if the way be sometimes dark,  
No matter though the cost be oft-times great,  
He knoweth how I best shall reach the mark,  
The way that leads to Him is seldom straight.*

*One thing I know, I cannot say Him nay;  
One thing I do, I press on towards my Lord.  
My God, my Glory here from day to day,  
And in the glory there, my Great Reward.*

*By Frederick Brook*



