

Dear Philippians, X

The Mark of Maturity

April 13, 2003

PHILIPPIAN FRIEZE

- There're a lot of curious ruins in Philippi.

We found this photo and couldn't figure out what it was. So, we tracked down the photographer, a professor at Georgia State.

Q: What do you think it is? Grinding wheel base? Pony ride track?

- According to Dr. Robert Viau it's a piece off of a roof.
- It's the triangular gable, laying flat; that's the peak.

The carved rectangles are called "dentil work;" similar to the sculpting on this Roman building from about Paul's time. The large disc supported a terracotta frieze medallion; similar to this sculpted frieze on the "Arch of Constantine".

- Put 'em together; you have the gable-end of a Roman Temple.
- These are the remains of the Philippian temple. Case solved!

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16

Paul was attacking the Judaizers and exposing the futility of self-righteousness. (They were followers of Christ who taught devotion to Mosaic Law as a means to gain God's full approval.)

- He told them his singular goal was to "know Christ".

He reminded the Philippians that as a Pharisee he was perfect (Benjamite, Hebrew, circumcised, zealous, and legalistic) but concerning his new goal of knowing Christ ...

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, 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, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ All of us 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. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained. – *Philippians 3:12-16 NIV*

FACING MY FAULTS

A Pharisee could be “perfect” because it’s all about adhering to a finite set of rules. Christianity has a different arrangement: It’s all about pressing into, knowing, and imitating the infinite character of God, through His Son Jesus Christ.

Paul was a Pharisee; he knew full-well their preoccupation with keeping up appearances. Paul exchanged rules for relationship, and now he’s free to be honest about his condition.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect ... I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. - Philippians 3:12 NIV

This simple, humble admission reveals so much about maturity:

- Spiritual Immaturity says: “Look how far I’ve come”
- Spiritual Maturity says: “Look how far I have to go”

We can fall into the trap of appearances – trying to give the impression that things are okay when they aren’t.

We do our own Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf imitation (the Iraqi Information Minister). “Hey, how’s your marriage doing?” Great! The infidel of divorce is not at our door! Divorce doesn’t surround us, we surround divorce!

- Transparency is a clear mark of emotional maturity

Like Paul, the longer I grow as a Christian the more aware I am of my own inadequacies, limitations, weaknesses and faults.

- You’ve got to admit where you are so you can access the distance left to go, and the path that’ll get you there.

People who cover over their sins will not prosper. – Proverbs 28:13 NLT

We can’t prosper in Christ unless we’re willing to face our faults, evaluate our progress, and share candidly with others.

FORGETTING THE FORMER

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead ... - Philippians 3:13 NIV

Q: Do you have regrets? Of course you do; we all do.

- Paul really regretted persecuting the early church.

When he says, “Forgetting what’s behind” he isn’t advocating amnesia; and he’s certainly not asking us to deny or evade our past, but to disable its power over us:

Two snakes slithering along, one asks, “We poisonous?” The other says, “I don't know, why?” “Cause I just bit my lip.”

We can poison ourselves by dwelling on past mistakes and failures and regrets.

- We must learn from the past without dwelling on it

We remember the nonsense that we should forget, and we forget the substance that we should remember.

- We tend to remember the test and forget the lesson.

That’s why it’s so important to face it; forgive it; confess it; grieve the losses and the consequences; and then release it.

... sadness or grief allows you to let go of what you cannot have in order to make room in your heart for what you can have. – Hiding From Love by Dr. John Townsend

- We tend to look back when we should be looking forward.

Anyone who starts plowing and keeps looking back isn’t worth a thing to God’s kingdom! – Luke 9:62 CEV

If a plowman doesn’t keep his eyes fixed on a distant aim his rows are going to be crooked.

The next time you catch yourself pondering past regrets, bite your lip, and remind yourself it’s poison.

It’s not just regrets that hold us back; But when Paul says, “Forgetting what is behind” that includes past successes if they cause us to rest on our laurels, or live in the past.

The problem with accomplishments is that they can make us complacent and/or conceited if we’re not paying attention.

Taking our eyes off the goal by focusing either on how far we’ve come or how poorly we’ve done will both get us off track.

FIGHT TO THE FINISH

This is why Paul says that he “Strains toward what is ahead.”

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 3:14 NIV

- You don't win a race by looking over your shoulder; It's a fight to the finish.

Q: What's the prize Paul is talking about?

A: Jesus. Not salvation; that's a free gift we're given when Christ “takes hold of us.”

Paul wants to take hold of that which is the *reason* Christ took hold of him (vs. 12) intimacy of relationship; consistency of devotion; understanding and insight; reflection of His likeness.

This is what Paul means when he says, “I'm still growing, still pushing forward, developing, expanding, and learning.”

- The only time we can coast is when we're going downhill.

THE MARK OF MATURITY

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. – Philippians 3:15 NIV

Paul has a very simple definition (view) of spiritual maturity.

1. Our core ambition must be to pursue closeness with Christ.
2. We must be honest (to self, God, & others) about failings.
3. We must not let past failures or successes block our goal.

When was the last time you took time to do a frank, personal evaluation (of your life, marriage, family, career, finances, and of course, relationship with God)?

We need to ask ourselves often:

Q: What faults do I need to face and change?

Q: Which memories do I need to move on from?

Q: Am I pressing on or simply coasting down?

- The mark of maturity is a transparent, whole-hearted pursuit of knowing Jesus.