

Theme: We must press on to grow in our salvation because Jesus has made us His own; we strive for this because it is our duty and our greatest pleasure.

I. Intro – A Season of Resolutions and Goal-Setting

We are in a season of making New Year’s resolutions. It is always obvious that some things should change, but what exactly needs to change and how should we go about changing it?

Statistically, ~90% of people fail to keep their resolutions. So what’s the point of even making resolutions if we always need new ones and often fail to keep the ones we do have?

As Christians, this introduces us to an even greater paradox: What should be the goal of our efforts if our salvation, and growth in that salvation depends on Christ’s works and not our own?

II. What Our Goal Should Be

1. We must press on to grow in our salvation.

- a. Paul is seeking to gain Christ and be found in Him, to have the righteousness of God, and to know the power of Christ’s resurrection at all costs. In other words, He is pressing on to make salvation his own. (*Philippians 2:12-13*)
- b. This sounds weird if we use a simplistic definition of salvation. Have you been saved, do you still need to be saved, or will you be saved? Yes! Salvation is the entire journey from the narrow gate to the gates of Heaven along the narrow path.

- c. Our goal this coming year must be to become more like Christ, to make real progress along the narrow path, and to get closer to the gates of Heaven. (*Hebrews 12:14*)
- c. For clarity: Is Paul saying that we need to “work” for our salvation with fear and trembling? No, but we must “work it out” with fear and trembling. Paul is exceedingly clear earlier in this chapter that his efforts to “work it out” have nothing to do with his right to be on the narrow path. (*Philippians 3:4-7*)

III. What Our Motivation Should Be

1. The answer is very simple, yet very complicated.

a. It introduces a paradox:

- He says Jesus has already made him His own
- He says he hasn’t attained this

b. This sounds crazy at first glance. It’s like a husband of twenty years saying they haven’t attained marriage, or made marriage their own!

2. Unpacking the Paradox

a. “He has made me his own...” In Paul’s own words, why does God make us His own? What is the promised result of God making us His own? (*Romans 8:29-30*)

- a. It is clear that those whom God makes His own will be justified, sanctified, and glorified. So then why does Paul feel it to be his duty to press on to make his salvation his own? Why does this tension not seem to bother him?

3. The Ultimate Motivation – He Has Made You His Own!

- a. First, consider who “He” is!

- He is the creator of all things
- He created you
- He is perfect and trustworthy
- He is infallible and unchanging
- He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love

b. Next, consider who you were! You:

- neglected God, prioritized everything but Him
- esteemed your own wisdom and desires above His
- treated Him with contempt, slandered His name

c. Consider who you are even now! Since coming to Christ, how many times have you:

- needlessly breached His trust and acted faithlessly
- backslid into old patterns of sin
- acted like a total hypocrite, bringing shame upon His name
- failed to be a true example of Him to others

d. Do we understand the gravity of the grace that has been given to us!? How could we not press on to make it our own? (1 Cor. 6:19-20, 2 Peter 1:9)

- People will argue in circles all day about hypothetical paradoxes and stumble over the stumbling stone. But if Christ has made you his own - and you understand this - it WILL CAUSE you to press on towards your salvation and towards greater holiness.

5. It Is for Our Own Joy!

“Again, we are told in the Scripture to serve the Lord with diligence, and is it not the diligent soul that is made rich? It is the do-nothing people, generally, who say— “Lord, what a wretched land is this that yields us no supplies!... If in the winter you complain of the cold, get to the plough, and you will soon glow with warmth, but sit down to moan and complain, and blow your blue fingers, you shall feel the cold more and more. Holy activity is the mother of holy joy. “

- Charles Spurgeon, *How to Become Full of Joy*

- Our primary source of joy is derived from a sense of usefulness to God, fulfillment of our purpose and duties. “(2 Pet. 2:8)
 - Husbands, Wives, Children, Grandparents, Singles, Employees/Employers, Friends,
 - In our suffering, in our blessing
 - We will cause flourishing in others and their flourishing joy will overflow back to us
- We will find joy in the tangible assurance of our salvation and a conscience at rest. (2 Pet. 2:10)
- We will find joy from preparing for ourselves a rich entrance into Heaven and many gifts to lay down at Christ’s feet. (2 Pet. 2:11)

6. Avoiding the Pitfalls

- a. Barbell Metaphor - There is only one way to lift a loaded barbell → in perfect balance. In other words, you must pick up both ends at the same time! It is impossible, and dangerous, to attempt to lift a loaded barbell from only one end. Similarly, if at any point during the lift it gets even slightly out of balance you risk great injury and falling completely over. We must treat biblical truths in the same way. If we are to stand and be strengthened by them, we must exalt both truths at the same time and with equal vigor. **If we fail to do this**, we will injure ourselves and potentially others.
- b. Mistake #1 - (only focusing on “He has made me has own” at the expense of “I press on to make it my own”):
 - Over-confidence in your belief that you have “been” saved, baptized, or delivered. This breeds apathy, laziness, irresponsibility, disobedience, hypocrisy, and the moral rot of those under your influence (whether suddenly or gradually)
 - Are you truly saved, but struggle with the motivation to take your faith are deadly serious as you ought to? Then you are probably stuck in this error.
- c. Mistake #2 (only focusing on “I press on to make it my own” at the expense of “He has made me has own”):
 - Over-emphasis on your duty to “press on to make it your own”. This breeds a kind a legalism, and a lifestyle contrary to the Gospel. You might become self-righteous and proud in your efforts, **OR** you might be continually discontent with your progress and despair. You think you are working in the strength of God but really it is your own effort. You end up suffocating those under your influence,

tying upon their shoulders burdens they cannot bear, ultimately leading to the rebellion of those under your authority.

- Are you truly saved, but struggle with spiritual burnout or over-confidence in your own zeal? Then you are probably stuck in this error.
- You may hear some people may argue over which mistake is the better one, but this is useless when you are still in error.

IV. Applying the Word: How We Must Press On

1. The result of understanding that Christ has made you His own - forgetting what lies behind (Philippians 3:14)

- a. By “forgetting”, Paul does not mean “don’t remember anything and pretend you have amnesia”. But what He does mean is that whatever lies behind you should have no bearing on your efforts to press on towards your salvation.
- b. Our past failures should not influence our desire to press on. Consider how this applied to Paul and how it applies to you. The Gospel frees us from cycles of unnecessary guilt.
- c. Our past successes should not influence our desire to press on. Consider how this applied to Paul and how it applies to you. The Gospel frees us from cycles of unnecessary pride as well.

2. The 2nd result - straining forward to what lies ahead

- a. Again, Paul holds this as no contradiction. These truths are not at odds. You are the one at odds with common sense if you

call yourself a Christian but can't find the will to press on to make salvation your own.

- How could you not strain towards God if you are really His own?

b. We must strain forward, primarily by prayers for God's mercy. Pleas for God's grace are the natural response to the realization that you must be that which you cannot be.

4. These things are signs of maturity. "Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you." (Philippians 3: 15)

- a. self-reflect and examine yourselves (Gal. 6:4), what needs to change this year? (reading the Word, relationships, prayer, etc.)

3. "...only let us hold true to what we have obtained." (Philippians 3:16)

- a. For the love of all things, do not give up what you have suffered up to this point to obtain (Gal. 3:3-4)
- b. Maybe you have never attained any of the things we have talked about today, then consider all things as loss for the sake of knowing Christ and being found in Him.
 - *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."*
 - *"...whoever comes to me I will never cast out."*

Press On Towards the Goal
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Philippians 3:12-16

