

Finding Strength

Philippians 3:10-12

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A. Be Conformed (vs. 10-11):

1. That I may know Him – Paul’s commitment to obey the Lord cost him everything, and the only reason he decided to continue to live by faith is so that once and for all he may gain a complete understanding because of the influence of the Holy Spirit, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

a) The passionate expression of Paul’s deepest longings. To know him is to experience the power that flows from union with the resurrected Christ and to enter into fellowship with his sufferings (all the hardships to be endured for the cause of Christ; cf. Acts 9:16). That these are two aspects of the same experience is indicated by the single article in Greek. Being conformed (pres. participle) to his death further defines the experience as one of continual dying out to self. 11. If by any means. An expression of humility, not of uncertainty. The resurrection from (*ek*, “out of”) the dead is the resurrection of believers, not a general resurrection.^[1]

b) *“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”* (Phil 1:9-11; NASB)

c) As in vs. 8, this knowledge is not merely factual; it includes the experience of the power of his resurrection (Eph. 1:17-20), of fellowship in his sufferings (Ac. 9:16) and of being like him in his death (2 Cor. 4:7-12; 12:9-10). Believers already share positionally in Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom. 6:2-13; Gal. 2:20; 5:24; 6:14; Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12-13; 3:1). In vs. 10, however, Paul speaks of the actual experience of Christ’s resurrection power and of suffering with and for him, even to the point of death.

2. The power of the resurrection – Forsaking everything to gain complete knowledge of Christ can inspire us to live as a result of the illumination of the Word of God (by the power of the Holy Spirit; renewing our minds leads to consistently obeying God) so that we gain wisdom to implement what we now clearly understand (1 Corinthians 2:10-15; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12), experiencing His strength being enabled to consistently living by faith every day.

a) The power which brought Christ forth from the dead now operates in believers' lives since they have been "raised with Christ" (Col. 3:1). "Power" (*dynamis*, also used in Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16) means ability to overcome resistance. By setting forth his own goals and ambitions Paul gave the Philippians an example to follow. His example was, of course, in stark contrast to the Judaizers whose example they were not to follow. ^[2]

3. The power of the resurrection – Paul's desire for counting everything lost was also to experience God's inner powerful ability to overcome all the obstacles he had to endure to the extent that no problem, no matter how great it caused him to stumble (2 Corinthians 4:7-15). It is this power that raised Christ from His greatest obstacle, death.

a) Finally, through Christ he was given a new promise: the "out-resurrection from the dead" (v. 11). The Jews believed in the resurrection, that is, a general resurrection at the end of the age; but Christ introduced a resurrection of the just out from among the dead. This is called the first resurrection (1 Thes. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:5). When Paul says "If by any means ..." he is not suggesting uncertainty but humility. To think that he, a murderer, should share in that glorious resurrection!.^[3]

4. The power of the resurrection – Paul viewed the flesh as weak and sinful (Galatians 5:16-21). The less we rely on the flesh (Christ said to deny ourselves; Luke 14:26-27) and the more we trust God's Word (powerful all by itself, Hebrews 12:4; and it does not return void, Isaiah 55:11), commit to obey it, the more the power of the Holy Spirit influences us to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh so that in our weakness we become strong (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). It is when we function in this manner we can overcome the wages of sin (leads to death; Romans 6:23) and the destructive nature of our struggles (because He who is in us; 1 John 4:4), and live as overcomers (Romans 8:37-39).

a) He has in mind the spiritual resurrection of the believing sinner spoken of in Ephesians 2:4-8, a resurrection out from a state in which he is dead in trespasses and sins to one in

which he is alive with the divine life of God motivating his being. Paul desires the full operation of this life to surge through his Christian experience in such a manner that the fragrance of the life of his Lord may permeate his life. This is the goal he is striving toward, but it is the goal he has not yet attained.

5. Fellowship of His sufferings - Because we commit to practice the Word of God so that we mature to comprehend the will of God (Ephesians 3:14-21), and therefore live in the power of the Holy Spirit, we intentionally set aside our interest and desires (Philippians 2:1-6), engage in an active partnership (Galatians 2:21) with Christ which transforms us (become saints, set aside to God) causing us to become susceptible to similar persecution Christ experienced (2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 1 Peter 4:13). This is why what Christ went through was an example for us to follow (1 Peter 2:21-25).

a) Paul was a citizen of Tarsus. When he lived there, only families of wealth and reputation were allowed to retain their Tarsian citizenship. This throws a flood of light upon Paul's early life. He was born into a home of wealth and culture. His family consisted of wealthy Jews living in one of the most progressive oriental cities. All this Paul left to become a poor itinerant missionary.

b) But not only did he forfeit all this when he was saved, but his parents would have nothing to do with a son who had in their estimation dishonored them by becoming one of those hated, despised Christians. They had reared him in the lap of luxury, had sent him to the Jewish school of theology in Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the great Gamaliel, and had given him excellent training in Greek culture at the University of Tarsus, a Greek school of learning.

c) Paul also longed to share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and in so doing to become 'like Him in His death' (Phil. 3:10). These sufferings were not Christ's substitutionary sufferings on the cross. Paul knew that those could not be shared. But he did desire to participate with Christ, since he was one of His, in suffering for the sake of righteousness ([cf. 1:29](#)). [God had used Ananias to tell Paul that this is precisely what he would do as a servant of Christ \(Acts 9:16\). The apostle did indeed suffer for Christ because he represented Him so openly and truly \(cf. Rom. 8:36; 2 Cor. 4:10\).](#) ^[4]

6. Fellowship of His sufferings - When we commit to surrendering ourselves completely to Christ, we lose ourselves to Christ (Galatians 2:20) and expose ourselves to persecution. What we go through, as a result, is to share in His sufferings. When this is who we become, Christ promises that this blesses us eternally (1 Peter 4:13; Romans 8:18; Revelation 2:21).

a) The ultimate sharing of Christ's resurrection occurs at the future resurrection of the righteous (in which most Jews believed). Many Jewish people believed that a period of sufferings would precede the resurrection, and this seems to be Paul's view as well (clear in Rom. 8:18-22, possibly reflected in Phil. 3:10-11).

b) Such afflictions may include physical sufferings such as imprisonment, floggings, beatings, hardships, and privations of different kinds (2 Cor. 11:23–28) as well as mental anguish (2 Cor. 1:4–11, esp. v. 8; 11:28). As Paul participates in Christ's sufferings, the tribulations through which every Christian must pass, so he desires to understand and experience God's power that was manifested in Christ's resurrection. That this understanding and experience is related to the saving events of dying and rising with Christ is made plain from the following words, 'being conformed to his death' (v. 10).^[5]

7. Conform to His death - The kind of focus just described directs a person's life to take on the likeness of Christ's life on earth (Philippians 1:21) so that they are consistently having to become a living sacrifice each day (Romans 12:1).

8. Attain to the resurrection of the dead – The purpose of all developing spiritual understanding, living in the power of the Holy Spirit, and finding strength in the midst of opposition or personal struggles is to a lifetime goal of overcoming the power of our sinful nature and to live blessed eternally when we pass.

a) The verb *καταντάω*, which turns up on thirteen occasions in the NT (only in Acts and Paul), is attested in secular Greek from the second century B.C. (Polybius) onwards; it originally meant 'to come to', and indicates a literal movement towards a goal, such as a place or a town. In a metaphorical sense it denoted the attainment of an objective, or conversely that which comes to a person.^[6]

9. Attain to the resurrection of the dead – Living surrendered to the Word of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, committed to Christ no matter the obstacles matures us to live as overcomers over the power of our sinful nature (Philippians 3:12-16; Romans 8:12-13). "...*knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all;*

but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:6-11; NASB)

B. Its Attainable (vs. 12):

1. Not that I have already obtained it – Paul admits that even though this is his goal (verses 8-11), he has not, once and for all, achieved the ability to live sinless (1 John 1:8).

a) Paul was satisfied with Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:10) but was not happy with his Christian life. A sanctified dissatisfaction is the first step toward progress in the Christian race.

b) The word "apprehend" is from the same Greek word translated "attained," but with a preposition prefixed, which means in its local force "down." He wants to catch hold of it and pull it down, like a football player who not only wants to catch his man but also pulls him down and makes him his own. Paul wants to appropriate and make his own that for which Christ caught Paul and made him His own.

c) The word "attained" in this verse is from a Greek word different from that in the preceding verse. In the latter instance, it meant "to arrive at, as at a goal." Here, the Greek verb speaks of an active appropriation. That which Paul says he has not yet appropriated in an absolute sense, he mentions in verse ten. He has come to experience, to some degree at least, the power of God surging through his being. He has entered into a joint participation with Christ in suffering for righteousness' sake. The stoning at Lystra is an example of that. He has been brought to the place in his experience where he radiates to some degree the selflessness, the self-abnegation of the Lord Jesus. But he has not appropriated these, laid hold upon these, in the fullest measure. There is room for much improvement and advance in these respects.

2. Have already become perfected – Paul's life has not met the complete state of always being in the character of Christ.

a) It means *full-grown* in contradistinction to undeveloped; for example, it is used of a full-grown man as opposed to an undeveloped youth. It is used to mean *mature in mind* and therefore means *one who is qualified in a subject* as opposed to a mere learner. When it is

used of offerings, it means *without blemish* and fit to offer God. When it is used of Christians, it often means *baptized persons who are full members of the Church*, as opposed to those who are still under instruction. In the days of the early Church it is quite often used to describe *martyrs*. A martyr is said to be *perfected by the sword*, and the day of his death is said to be the day of his *perfecting*. The idea is that a man's Christian maturity cannot go beyond martyrdom.^[7]

3. Have already become perfected – Even though we may experience more and more moments where the influence of the flesh is no longer a significant factor in our lives, living sinless takes place only in heaven.

a) In the language of athletic competition used metaphorically by ancient moralists-Paul describes his striving for the future hope of 3:11. Greco-Roman sages sometimes admitted that they were not yet "perfect" but spoke of themselves as the "mature," the wise, as opposed to those who were still novices. (Commentators note that the mystery cults described the highest stage of initiation as "perfection" or "completion," but this is probably less relevant here than the language of sages) "What is behind" (NIV)

4. I press on so that I may lay hold – Despite knowing that living in the power of the resurrection does not provide the ability to live with no influences of sin, we must remain resolute to energetically pursue righteousness that comes by faith (verse 9). We must own this attitude so that the power of the resurrection is a powerful daily experience.

5. I lay hold by Christ Jesus – We can "lay hold by Christ" because we "can do all things through Him who strengthens us." (Philippians 4:13).

6. I lay hold by Christ Jesus – We can "lay hold by Christ" once by faith we experience the righteous work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we grow in our knowledge of Christ, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, obstacles strengthen us (2 Corinthians 12:7-12) shaping us to live more in the nature of Christ than by the influences of sin that once corrupted us.

a) Paul continuously repeats Christ throughout this passage because Christ is his focus. It is no longer what he had based on the Jewish system. It is now Christ and Christ alone. This is why this passage leads to pressing on in verse 12-14.

[1] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Php 3:9). Moody Press.

[2] Lightner, R. P. (1985). [Philippians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 661). Victor Books.

[3] Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 567). Victor Books.

[cf.](#) confer, compare

[4] Lightner, R. P. (1985). [Philippians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 661). Victor Books.

[5] O'Brien, P. T. (1991). *The Epistle to the Philippians: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 406). Eerdmans.

[6] O'Brien, P. T. (1991). *The Epistle to the Philippians: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 414). Eerdmans.

[7] Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 5, p. 96). Eerdmans.