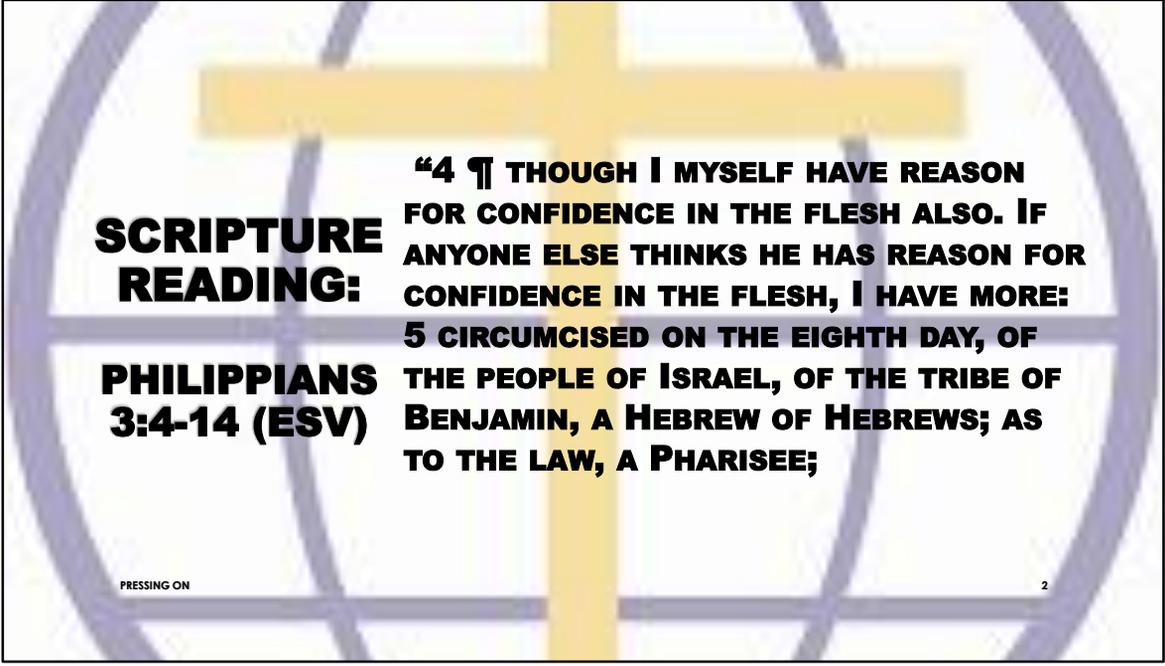
A stylized globe with a yellow cross overlaid on it. The globe is represented by a grid of grey lines on a light blue background, with a yellow cross centered over it.

PRESSING ON

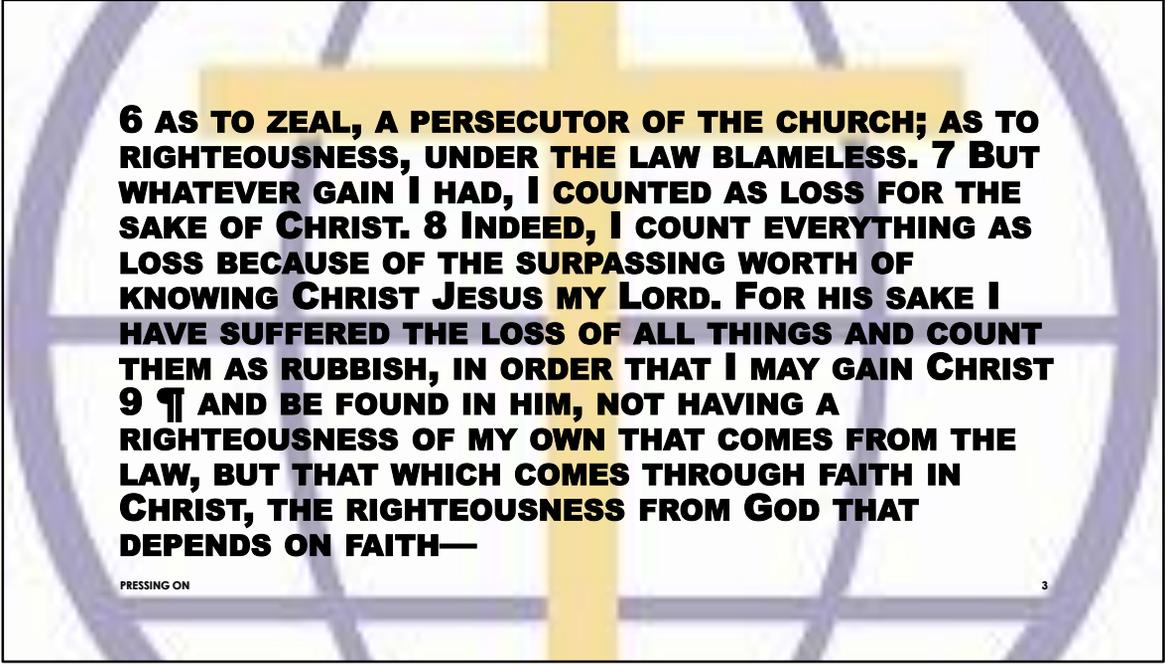
**Grace Communion International
Minister: Eric Vautour
Date: April 7, 2019**



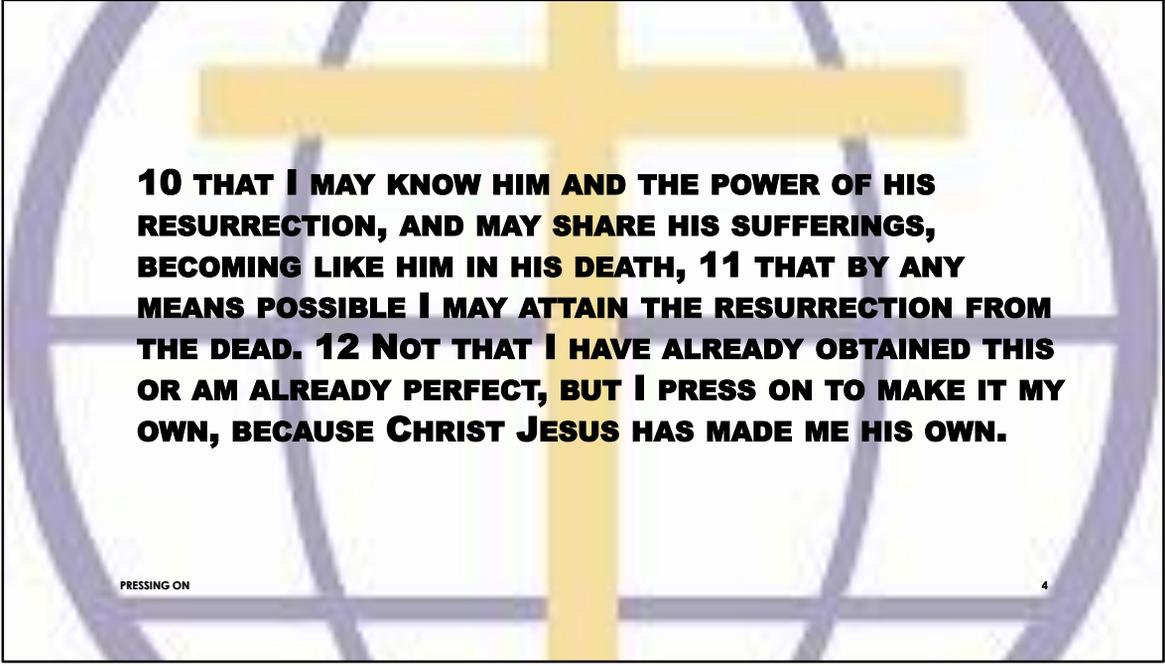
**SCRIPTURE
READING:**

**PHILIPPIANS
3:4-14 (ESV)**

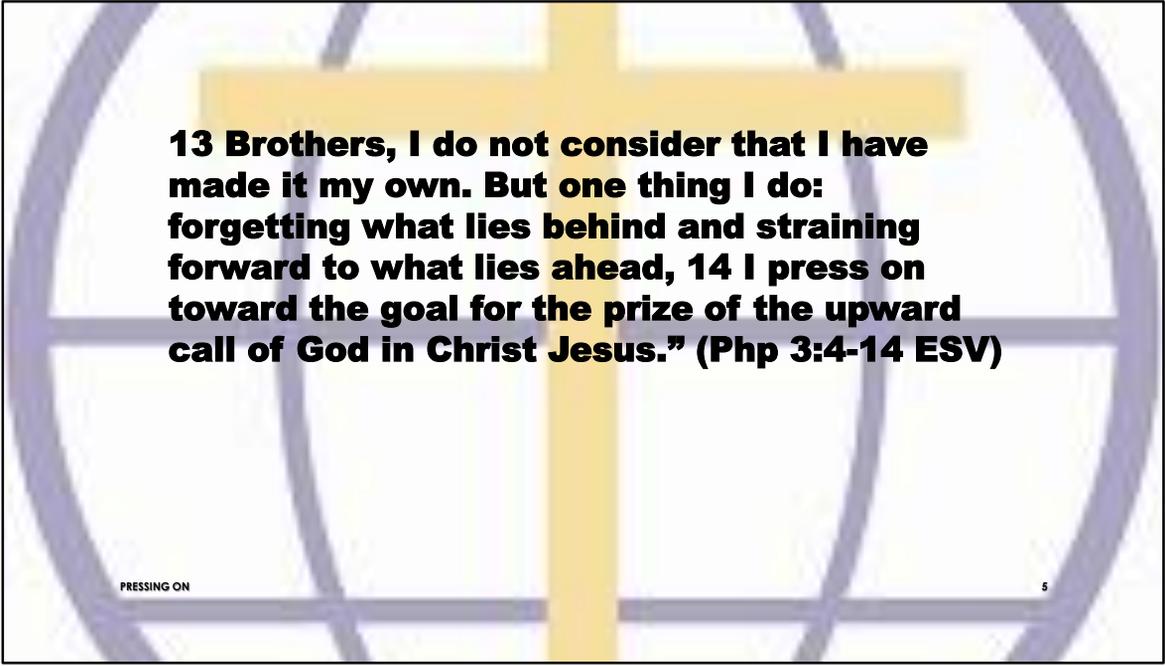
**“4 ¶ THOUGH I MYSELF HAVE REASON
FOR CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH ALSO. IF
ANYONE ELSE THINKS HE HAS REASON FOR
CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH, I HAVE MORE:
5 CIRCUMCISED ON THE EIGHTH DAY, OF
THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, OF THE TRIBE OF
BENJAMIN, A HEBREW OF HEBREWS; AS
TO THE LAW, A PHARISEE;**



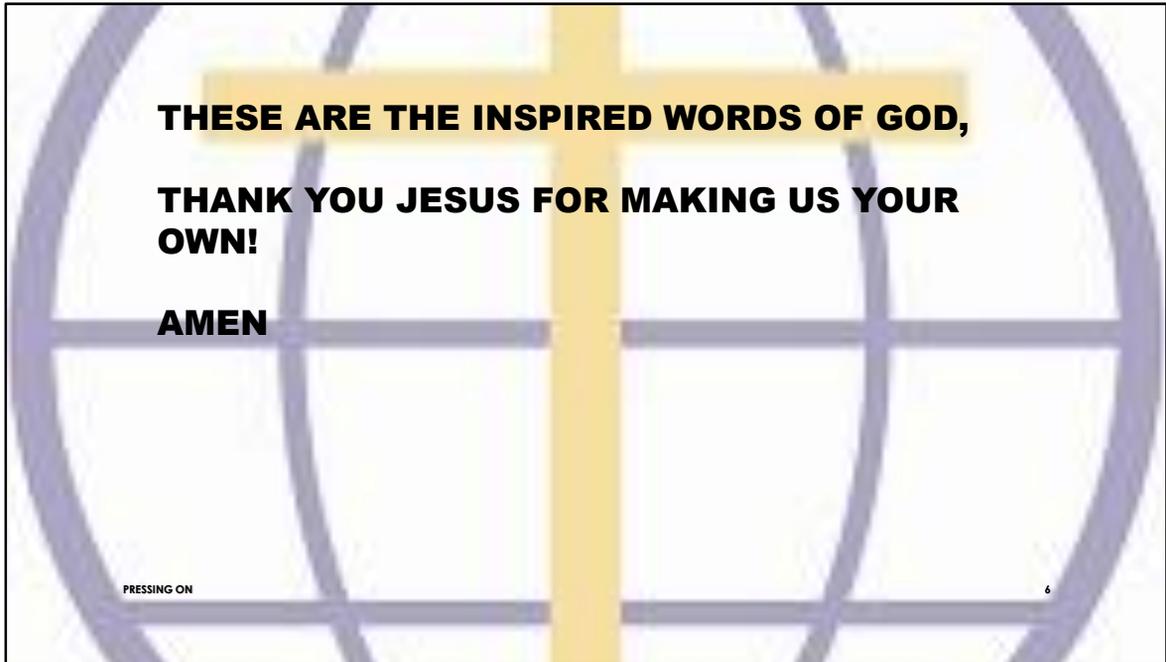
**6 AS TO ZEAL, A PERSECUTOR OF THE CHURCH; AS TO
RIGHTEOUSNESS, UNDER THE LAW BLAMELESS. 7 BUT
WHATEVER GAIN I HAD, I COUNTED AS LOSS FOR THE
SAKE OF CHRIST. 8 INDEED, I COUNT EVERYTHING AS
LOSS BECAUSE OF THE SURPASSING WORTH OF
KNOWING CHRIST JESUS MY LORD. FOR HIS SAKE I
HAVE SUFFERED THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS AND COUNT
THEM AS RUBBISH, IN ORDER THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST
9 ¶ AND BE FOUND IN HIM, NOT HAVING A
RIGHTEOUSNESS OF MY OWN THAT COMES FROM THE
LAW, BUT THAT WHICH COMES THROUGH FAITH IN
CHRIST, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD THAT
DEPENDS ON FAITH—**



10 THAT I MAY KNOW HIM AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION, AND MAY SHARE HIS SUFFERINGS, BECOMING LIKE HIM IN HIS DEATH, 11 THAT BY ANY MEANS POSSIBLE I MAY ATTAIN THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. 12 NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY OBTAINED THIS OR AM ALREADY PERFECT, BUT I PRESS ON TO MAKE IT MY OWN, BECAUSE CHRIST JESUS HAS MADE ME HIS OWN.



13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Php 3:4-14 ESV)



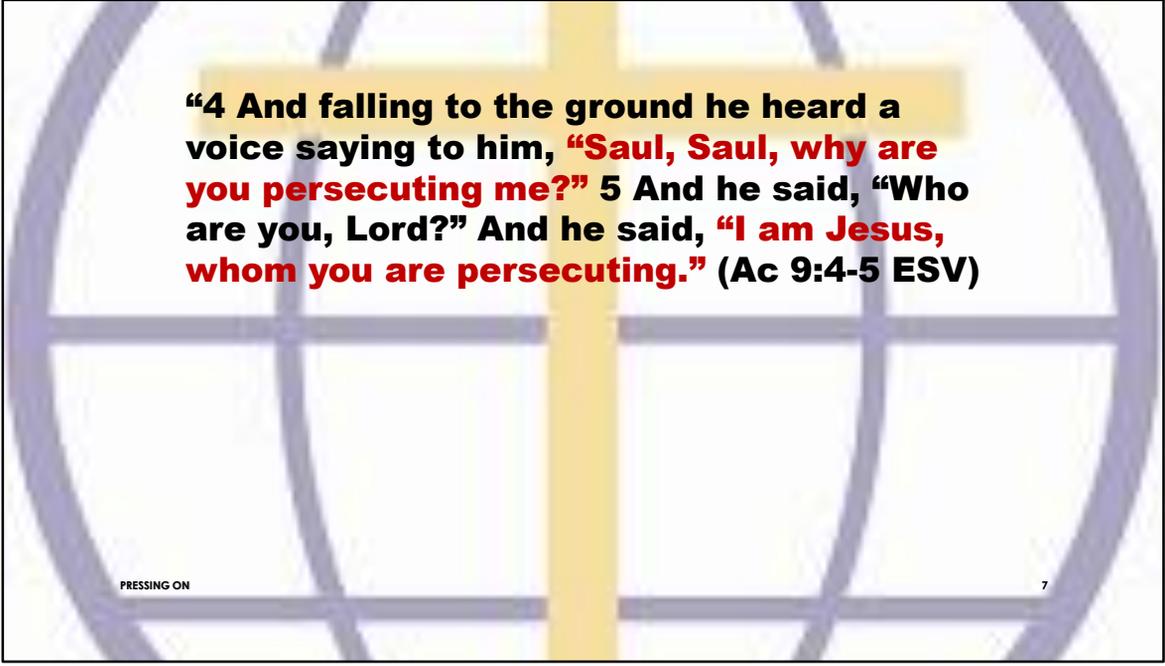
During today's sermon, let us stop and think how Paul viewed life in his new relationship with Christ and what we can learn and apply in our life.

As we consider this topic, we must always consider who is the central figure in these writings. We must never forget that Jesus, the eternal son of God, is the central figure. We can learn from the apostle Paul what is an appropriate response to Jesus.

As we know, from the book of Acts, Jesus revealed himself to the apostle Paul in a very dramatic way. Paul was a devout and zealous Pharisee. He had gone on a mission to persecute Christians thinking that he was doing God's work.

In Acts 9, we read that Paul had a profound hatred against the disciples of the Lord. He had asked and was given permission to go to Damascus to catch Christians, both men and women, to bring them back bound to Jerusalem. As he was going to complete his oppressive and persecutory mission, Jesus revealed himself to the apostle Paul who was at the time named Saul. He asked Saul a very pointed question.

(Next slide)



“4 And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” 5 And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” (Ac 9:4-5 ESV)

PRESSING ON

7

What a shock that was for Paul (Saul). His zeal as a Pharisee caused him to hate “the followers of The Way”. In his mind, he had no doubt that he was serving God.

Jesus, being the head of the church and his disciples part of his body, took the persecution of his disciples very personally. Persecuting followers of Jesus is equivalent to persecuting Jesus.

From the time of this encounter and beyond, the life of Paul was completely transformed as he participated in God’s special mission for him.

His life was completely transformed. God made Paul a very special blessing to all generations that followed his life. We still have his writings today, inspired writings which God has used, uses and will use to transformed millions of lives.

Prior to his conversion, Paul had all kinds of credentials, some he inherited and some he worked very hard to attain. The following is his resume.

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THE APOSTLE PAUL'S RESUME

- **CIRCUMCISED ON THE EIGHTH DAY;**
- **OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL;**
- **OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN AND THEREFORE A HEBREW OF HEBREWS;**
- **AS TO THE LAW—A PHARISEE THEREFORE A STRICT OBSERVER OF THE LAW;**
- **VERY ZEALOUS—A PERSECUTOR OF THE CHURCH, HIGHLY REGARDED BY MANY IN THE SOCIETY IN HIS DAY;**
- **BLAMELESS IN HIS KEEPING OF THE LAW—HE HAD VERY HIGH STANDARDS AND A STRONG LEGAL ETHIC;**
- **PERCEIVED HIMSELF AND PERCEIVED BY OTHERS TO BE RIGHTEOUS.**

PRESSING ON

8

In his time, prior to his conversion, Paul was a very well respected man among the elite of his society. He was also well known by others.

His zealousness was widespread, that at first, the disciples of Jesus had difficulty trusting him. **“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.” (Ac 9:26 ESV).**

From being very proud of his past, Jesus miraculous meeting with him completely transformed his life and his perception of his past accomplishments and worldly achievements.

PAUL'S PERCEPTION OF HIS PAST

- **“8 INDEED, I COUNT EVERYTHING AS LOSS BECAUSE OF THE SURPASSING WORTH OF KNOWING CHRIST JESUS MY LORD. FOR HIS SAKE I HAVE SUFFERED THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS AND COUNT THEM AS RUBBISH, IN ORDER THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST 9 ¶ AND BE FOUND IN HIM, NOT HAVING A RIGHTEOUSNESS OF MY OWN THAT COMES FROM THE LAW, BUT THAT WHICH COMES THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD THAT DEPENDS ON FAITH—” (PHP 3:8-9 ESV)**

PRESSING ON

9

Everything in Paul's past paled in comparison compared to his knowing of Jesus. "Paled in comparison" does not appropriately reflect Paul's attitude towards his past.

He considered the things lost in his past as **rubbish— skubalon skoo'-bal-on**—which the Strong's Concordance defines in the following way: **1) any refuse, as the excrement of animals, offscourings, rubbish, dregs 1a) of things worthless and detestable.**

Obviously, his past was not the focus of his attention because of the newness of life found in Jesus Christ . He was willing to let those things behind to gain Christ and to be found in Christ.

He realized that his righteousness was worth nothing as zealous as he was prior to his conversion. He realized that his righteousness from law-keeping was worthless. Only a righteousness coming from faith in God counts for anything of eternal value.

Paul gave his relationship to Jesus top priority over everything in his life. He had faith in God just as Abraham did.

What were the results of placing their faith in God?

(Next slide)

- **“5 AND HE BROUGHT HIM OUTSIDE AND SAID, “LOOK TOWARD HEAVEN, AND NUMBER THE STARS, IF YOU ARE ABLE TO NUMBER THEM.” THEN HE SAID TO HIM, “SO SHALL YOUR OFFSPRING BE.” 6 AND HE BELIEVED THE LORD, AND HE COUNTED IT TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (GE 15:5-6 ESV)**

Abraham did not become perfect in the flesh but because of his faith and belief in God. God counted, considered him righteousness because he believed, because he had faith. He first believed and God gave him his righteousness.

The apostle Paul says exactly the same thing in Romans. **“3 For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:” (Ro 4:3-6 ESV)**

God counts the ungodly who have faith in God as a righteous.

Because God counted them as righteous, did that mean that Abraham and David become physically perfect in the flesh?

Of course not. This is not what it means. Reading the Bible, we know Abraham and David were not perfect in the flesh. One thing the faithful men and women in the Bible had was faith in God, faith in Jesus. Because of it, in God’s eyes, they were counted as

righteous by God.

Jesus, by dying and taking the place of the ungodly, removed the penalty of sin which is death. When we come to faith in Jesus, God imputes his righteousness on us. He considers us righteous even if we are imperfect in the flesh still.

The apostle Paul is very clear in 1 Corinthians that Jesus is our righteousness. Through faith in Jesus, God also counts us as being righteous compared to being ungodly before becoming united with him.

The question which may arise is what part does the faith of Jesus and our human faith combined?

The Bible tells us very clearly that we do have a human responsibility to believe. When we embrace the righteousness provided by God the Father through Jesus resulting from his death, resurrection and ascension to heaven, God comes to live in us and we live in him. Our faith is in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the object of our faith. Jesus is the perfect faithful one for us who saves. Consequently, our human faith is a participation in Jesus' perfect faithfulness.

This should give all of us great encouragement as we follow Christ. Every day, we exercise our faith in Christ. As his followers, we trust him for the outcome of our life.

Just as Abraham, David, the apostle Peter and others, will we mess up at times? Of course we will. Because God counts us as righteous does not mean that we live an ideal and perfect life. Our desire is to live a perfect life. We know our righteousness apart from God counts for nothing. We can only count on the true righteousness given to us in Christ.

The apostle Paul, in his epistles, tells us how to live in Christ and what to avoid as children of God. ***"16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."* (Ga 5:16-17 ESV)**

Exercising our faith in Jesus, in God, therefore will affect how we live.

The following is what the apostle Paul said. (Next slide)

“10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (Php 3:10-12 ESV)

PRESSING ON

11

It is interesting what the apostle Paul says. He was forward-looking—looking forward to the resurrection from the dead .

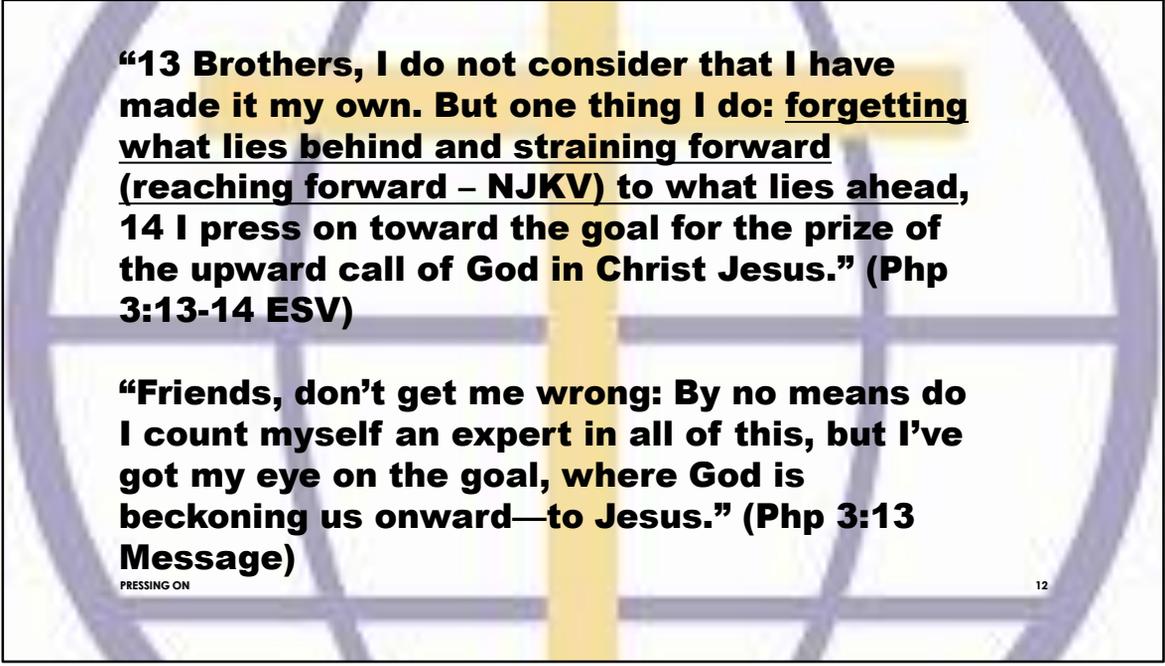
Because Paul was still living his physical life, he realized that even if it was considered righteous by God through faith in him, he pressed on towards the goal because he realized that he now belonged to Jesus.

“To press on” comes from the Greek word **dioko** *dee-o'-ko* which means **metaphorically (in a figure of speech), 5) metaph., to pursue 5a) to seek after eagerly, earnestly endeavour, to acquire (Strong's Concordance).**

The apostle Paul took his calling very seriously. Because he knew he was considered righteous by God through faith, he sought eagerly, with zeal, with enthusiasm to obey and to follow Jesus. The obedience is not a cause of righteousness, it is the result of righteousness imputed or given to us by God.

Consequently, the apostle Paul pressed on, pushed himself, because he did not belong to himself anymore. He belonged to Christ. Knowing that he belonged to God caused them to be joyous, contented, and focused.

Let us look again at how Paul looked at his life. (Next slide)



“13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward (reaching forward – NJKV) to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Php 3:13-14 ESV)

“Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus.” (Php 3:13 Message)

PRESSING ON

12

If anyone had reasons to be shackled by his past, it was the apostle Paul. He had caused untold and countless sufferings and heartaches. He participated in the murder of Stephen. He caused great pain and anguish to Christians, to their families, to their children and I am sure even to unconverted relatives who were concerned about what the apostle Paul was doing as he pursued in persecuted Christians.

Can we imagine what it must have been like to be at home and to have Saul (Paul's old name), knock at your door. I'm sure there was panic, pleading from these people not to be separated from their children, etc...

Paul did not let his past behaviour be the daily focus of his life. The daily focus of his life was serving God, serving Jesus and pressing on towards the goal of eternal life, encouraging others to do the same.

What can we learn from the life of Paul?

None of us have perfect past prior to conversion. Even during our Christian walk, we have made mistakes and have sinned just like David, like Abraham and like the apostle Peter who denied Jesus and who, at one time in his post conversion life, acted

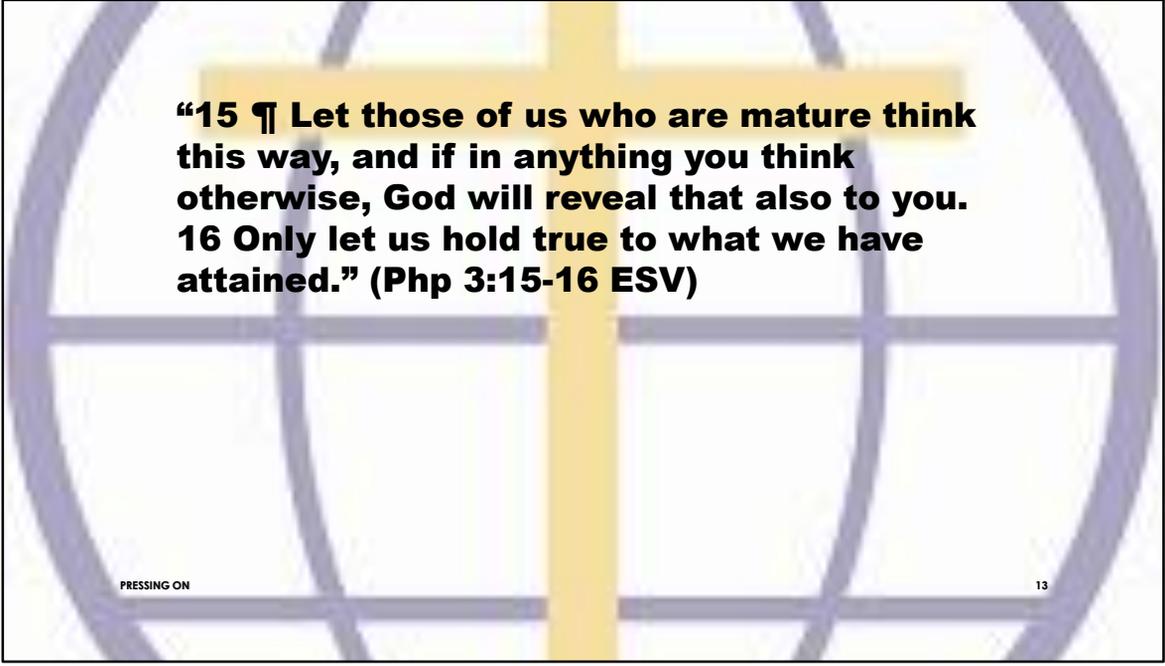
inappropriately because of his fear of man. He feared those of the circumcision and he acted hypocritically (Galatians 2).

These all sinned because of human weakness. However, the orientation of their life was directed by their faith in God who considered them righteous.

Do we let our past rob us of the joy of our present relationship with Jesus? Does it stop us from eagerly seeking God and from eagerly pressing on and straining forward to what lies ahead in Christ.

The apostle Paul did not deny his terrible past. But in Christ, he made peace with it. He stopped carrying unnecessary guilt, shame and self-condemnation because he now belonged to Christ. Belonging to Christ made all the difference for him. Does it for us?

He responded to God who beckoned him forward through the Holy Spirit.



“15 ¶ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.” (Php 3:15-16 ESV)

PRESSING ON

13

Those are very encouraging words. The apostle Paul, being very pastoral, realized that people were at different levels of maturity. He trusted God to lead those who might not understand as deeply as he did that God would intervene and help them in their Christian growth and maturity.

As the writer of the book of Hebrews says in chapter 10:30 - **We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, what of those who have faith and preserve their souls.**

Let us pray to hold firmly to Jesus, as Eugene Peterson says in the Message Bible, **"Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it." Let us press on because Jesus has made us his own!**

Let us pray.