

Damsel in Distress

#3 Dwelling in the Past (Philippians 3:13-14)

I. Introduction

A. The Occasion:

Philippians is a thank you letter from Paul to the church at Philippi. Since the believers were squabbling among themselves, he uses this occasion to instruct those believers to live in unity. He writes that only in Christ can we live in true unity and find joy in life.

B. The city:

Philippi was a Roman military outpost not a commercial center. It had a limited number of Jews (that's why there wasn't a synagogue when Paul first arrived – Acts 16:13). The conversion of Lydia (and others) on his second missionary journey began Paul's ministry in Philippi. He visited there again on his third missionary journey. He writes this letter some eleven years later.

C. Their generosity:

When Paul was in a Roman prison, the Philippi church on several occasions sent an emissary (including Epaphroditus) with financial gifts. Paul is writing to say thank you for those gifts.

II. Look at the passage at hand: Phil. 3:13-14

Towards the end of this letter, Paul is calmly drawing a conclusion. He had not completely grasped why the Lord had grasped him, but ONE-THING sums up his Christian conduct and focus in life. That ONE THING has to do with forward thinking, not dwelling in the past.

"Forgetting"- it means, "completely forgetting"

"Paul uses an illustration here of a Greek runner completely forgetting his opponents whom he is leading in the race..." (Philippians in the Greek New Testament, p. 97). It does not however mean obliterating the memory of the past (Paul had just recalled some of these things in vs. 5-7). He is just making a conscious effort not to let them absorb his attention and therefore obstruct his progress toward the goal.

"*Reaching Forth*"- another Greek athletic term, this one describing a runner who is stretching out towards the goal.

"*The Goal*" (the mark, the target, and the finish line: see II. Tim. 4:6-8) for the "The Prize" (see Rev. 4:10).

III. "Forgetting those things which lie behind..." - IT IS TOUGH TO DO!

A. Our own "issues"

1. Our mistakes: (Taken from Swindoll's Three Steps Forward Two Steps Back)
 - a. "Panic-Prompted Mistakes" We make these out of fear, or worry, or as a result of being in a hurry. Example: Gen. 12:10 (Famine in the land, Abraham goes to Egypt, lies about Sarah)
 - b. "Good Intentioned Mistakes" We have good intentions, but use the wrong planning or wrong methods. Example: Ex. 2:11-12 (Moses killing the Egyptian)
 - c. "Neglect Mistakes" These are a result of laziness or inconsistency or maybe just a lack of discipline. Example: I Kings 1:5-6 (David neglecting the discipline of his son Adonijah)
 - d. "Unrestrained-Curiosity Mistakes" These often relate to the sensational. Example: I Samuel 28 (Saul trying to speak to Samuel through a medium)
 - e. "Blind-Spot Mistakes" These are the ones we commit out of ignorance or habit. We are blinded to the truth. Example: Gal. 2:11-15 (Peter and the issue of legalism)
2. Our outright rebellion towards God and His commands.

Psalm 51:4 "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge."
3. God's response is found in Psalm 31:9-24. God sees us realistically and intimately, but does not reject us!

The basis of our moving beyond our "past" is:

 - a. Repent – turn from the sin. Turn to Christ. See John 8:11
 - b. Accept his forgiveness and move on! See 1 John 1:9

B. Our issues with forgiving others

Forgiveness of others is not an option, it is required by God. We are to forgive as Christ has forgiven us (Col. 3:13). Look at the parable of Matthew 18:23-25.

(The following material was adapted from the book Victory Over the Darkness by Neil Anderson)

1. What does it mean to forgive someone who has hurt us?
 - a. Forgiving is not necessarily forgetting. Our minds don't work that way. But knowledge and a repeated focus are 2 different things.
 - b. Forgiveness is not tolerating sin. No one should be a doormat for someone else's continual sin. "It's okay to forgive another's past sins and at the same time take a stand against future sins."
 - c. Forgiveness does not demand revenge or repayment for offenses suffered. "You mean I'm supposed to let them off the hook? Yes, you let them off your hook, realizing that they aren't off God's hook. Unforgiveness keeps you hooked to that person and your past."
 - d. Forgiveness is setting the captive free and then realizing that you were the captive. God is just the judge who will make everything right – Romans 12:19.
 - e. Forgiveness means resolving to live with the consequences of another person's sin. The choice is to live in the freedom of forgiveness or the bondage of bitterness. "If we are to forgive as Christ has forgiven us (Eph. 4:31-32), then we, like Him, must take the offenses of others upon ourselves."

2. Steps to forgiveness

The principle: As long as we continue to hang on to the past, the person is still hurting us and the pain will remain. We are not primarily a victim of the past, we are primarily a child of God and forgiveness sets us free to live like one." Look at Galatians 5:1 and 23.

- a. In prayer, ask God to show you whom you need to forgive
- b. Face the hurt. Be specific. Remember that forgiveness deals with our emotional response toward an offender. We are not pardoning them. A pardon deals with the consequence of a particular offense. Unless we have the authority, we may not be in a position to pardon an offense, but we can always forgive!

- c. Recognize that forgiveness is a choice. It may even be a crisis of your will. As you choose to relive the hurt, say "Lord, I forgive _____ for _____ (listing every offense that God brings to mind)."
 - d. Be clear, it's "Lord, I forgive," not "I want to forgive" or "help me to forgive."
3. Remember, the reward of forgiveness is freedom, not necessary reconciliation. Reconciliation is dependent on the other person. Your relationship with God and your freedom from the past are not dependent on other people.

IV. Our past...

What has happened to us, does affect us...for good or ill. It is our choice. See Gen. 50:20