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WORK IN PROGRESS

"Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained," Philippians 3:12-16. We are not perfect. I am so painfully imperfect, I sometimes wonder how God could possibly continue to put up with me. And then I read this statement by the Apostle Paul.

comes over me when I find that he puts himself right there in the same category. Paul is essentially saying, he knows he is not perfect. For some, that is an incredibly difficult quality to even acknowledge. Many are so self-absorbed in grooming their own image that the very thought of faults of their own is so beneath them they almost refuse to even admit to the possibility of their presence. Others are so humiliated and defeated by the obvious shortcomings in their life that they feel there is no hope of them even being given the chance to improve. Paul had an amazing and encouraging attitude in that he both admits his faults, while being hopeful of the future for him to rise above them and grow to becoming closer to Christ. Paul was always eagerly willing to paint himself "as is," as a work in progress with plenty of work

ahead to be done for future progress. “For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members,” Romans 7:14-23. The brutal honesty of Paul concerning his shortcomings and weaknesses is both refreshing and encouraging, especially when we see it in the light he put it in. Paul saw himself merely as an imperfect, sinful man in the

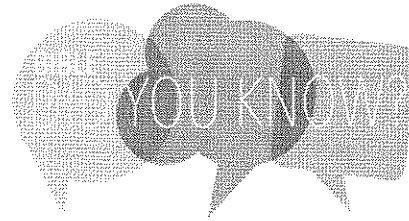
flesh, who, through Christ strengthening him in the inner man was growing to become more like Him every day. Even while acknowledging the brutal reality of his sins, Paul refused to sit and wallow in a state of failure and misery. Instead, he kept leaving them in the past, refusing to keep them with him, shedding his past like old skin that was never to be seen or worn again. Paul said he would rather forget about what was behind and press forward to what was ahead. Just like the phrase we often see, never allow yourself to be defined by your past mistakes. It was a lesson, not a life-sentence. Paul saw his sinful shortcomings as exactly that, lessons to learn from as he continued to press on to growing stronger in the Lord. He refused to keep his eyes on the past. Paul very frankly states that he is not there yet. He has not yet arrived. There is still so much growing and learning and developing to do. Paul gives us all a wonderful perspective. He provides the permission to see ourselves as imperfect sinners merely devoted to the process of progress and improvement as we faithfully continue to follow and learn from Him. In this state of honest optimistic humility, Paul would always much rather boast and admit his weaknesses as he demonstrated

the faithful progress that was possible by relying completely on the strength of the Lord and not on himself. "If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands," 2 Corinthians 11:30-33.

Regardless of the heroic accolades often thrown by others in adoration of his mighty work, Paul would rather put before others the image of him being open and vulnerable and too weak to overcome any of the powerful threats of his enemies, but sitting humbly in a basket relying on the Lord to use the ingenuity and help of his brethren to bring him to safety. In this way, Paul reminds us that regardless of what triumphs he ever experienced in life, his weaknesses and shortcomings far outweighed them, and yet, joyfully and faithfully continued to rely upon the strength of Christ to grow stronger each day, determined to be as close to Him as possible. Let us imitate this great example. While also recognizing and admitting our own humiliating

shortcomings and failures, let them remain in the past, more determined than ever to seek Christ to lead us closer home. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," Philippians 4:13.

– Daniel Ruegg



"And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, 'If You are willing, You can make me clean.'

Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed."

Mark 1:40-42

BIBLE TRIVIA

C H A L L E N G E

DIRECTIONS: After searching through your Bible, circle which answer is correct.

1. To the church in Ephesus, Jesus said they hated the deeds of the ____.

- a) Kardashians
- b) Nicolaitans
- c) Bereans
- d) Judaizing Teachers

2. To the church in Smyrna, Jesus said ____ would cast some in prison.

- a) Herod
- b) Nero
- c) Pilate
- d) The Devil

3. To the church in Pergamum, Jesus said to those who overcame He would give some of the hidden ____.

- a) Manna
- b) Truth
- c) Treasure
- d) Gold

4. To the church in Thyatira, Jesus said they tolerated the woman ____.

- a) Sarah
- b) Martha
- c) Mary
- d) Jezebel

5. To the church in Sardis, Jesus said there were a few who had not ____ their garments.

- a) Soiled
- b) Lost
- c) Sold
- d) Ripped

6. To the church in Philadelphia, Jesus said He would keep them from the hour of ____.

- a) Sleep
- b) Death
- c) Power
- d) Testing

7. To the church in Laodicea, Jesus said to those He loves He ____.

- a) Rewards
- b) Blesses
- c) Disciplines
- d) Commends

8. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and ____."

- a) Sleep
- b) Knock
- c) Attack
- d) Rebuke

9. Jesus said "Blessed is he who ____ the words of the prophecy of this book."

- a) Reads
- b) Teaches
- c) Heeds
- d) Knows

10. Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the ____."

- a) Centurion
- b) Lion
- c) Lamb
- d) Omega

1) B, Reference: Rev. 2:6
 2) D, Reference: Rev. 2:10
 3) A, Reference: Rev. 2:17
 4) D, Reference: Rev. 2:20
 5) A, Reference: Rev. 3:4
 6) D, Reference: Rev. 3:10

7) C, Rev. 3:19
 8) B, Rev. 3:20
 9) C, Rev. 22:7
 10) D, Rev. 22:13