

**Subject: *The High Calling of God***

**Scripture: *Philippians 3:12-16***

The Christian life is a calling. We usually think of the word call or calling in the life of a pastor, missionary, or some other full-time Christian vocation, but the word as used in Scripture is not limited to that. If you are a Christian you are called by God to a certain kind of life.

**Romans 8:29-30**<sup>29</sup> *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*<sup>30</sup> *Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

**1 Corinthians 1:9** *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**1 Corinthians 1:26-27**<sup>26</sup> *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:*<sup>27</sup> *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*

**Ephesians 4:1** *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*

**2 Timothy 1:9** *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

**Hebrews 3:1** *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.*

**1 Peter 5:10** *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.*

The Christian life is a calling that begins with God's eternal election and is worked out in time through His drawing, conviction, and regeneration. His calling includes growing in grace and spiritual maturity (sanctification) and ends with our full likeness to Christ in glorification.

### **1. Believers need to follow after God's high calling (vs. 12)**

Paul said that he had not arrived in his Christian life. In Acts 9 we read about Paul's salvation experience while he traveled on the Damascus road. He was on his way to persecute and arrest Christians, when the Lord stopped him in his tracks and arrested him. Christ apprehended (NASB, "laid hold of") Paul. From that point on Paul lived for Christ and realized it was his duty and privilege to lay hold of Christ and the calling upon his life. Paul says, "Christ got a hold on me and it my goal to get a hold on Him and His will for my life.

From the moment he was saved, Paul could say I am satisfied with Christ, but he was never satisfied with himself. He was always striving, always following, always serving Christ. As

he wrote in Philippians 2:12-13, he was always “working out” his salvation because God was working in him.

It has been said the biggest room in the world is room for improvement, and is that ever true in our Christian life. There is never a time to be complacent or become indifferent. On the slope of a tall mountain in Switzerland there is a grave marker with three words inscribed: “He died climbing.”

## **2. Believers need to focus on God’s high calling (vs. 13-14)**

Like the apostle Paul, we need a holy dissatisfaction (vs. 12) and a holy desire (vs. 13-14), and that means to be single-minded. If there is any key to the Christian life it is to simplify and make it all about Christ (Phil. 1:21, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain”).

### **A. Focus on one thing**

In verse 13 we find a key to the Christian life...”this one thing I do.” He didn’t say, “These 10 things I dabble in.” Some of you will remember the NIKE commercial that featured Bo Jackson, one of the greatest athletes of all time. That commercial showed highlight of Bo Jackson playing football and baseball while the announcer said, “Bo knows football, Bo knows baseball, Bo knows hockey...” Nobody, even Bo Jackson, can focus on everything.

Most of us have heard the saying, “he is a jack of all trades and master of none.” But what Benjamin Franklin actually said was that we should be a jack of all trades and master of one. For the Christian that one thing is to focus on our Christian life. We need to narrow our interests. We need to be like Nehemiah who was working on rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and people tried to distract him while he worked, but he said: “I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down.”

### **B. Forget what is behind and focus on what is ahead**

Paul was focused on one thing...he forgot what was behind and he reached for what was ahead. He didn’t live in past, but he lived in the present and looked toward the future. Paul chose to forget the same things we need to forget...past achievements and past failures.

When you’re young you can do some pretty crazy things. I remember when one of my friends in high school drove his car home one night in reverse. That’s foolish and dangerous. Something else is dangerous...trying to drive forward while looking in your rearview mirror. Some people are trying to live that way...they keep looking back.

We need to live like Paul (vs. 14), always looking forward and pressing toward the mark for the prize of God’s high calling. The word “mark” (Gk., *skopos*) could refer to the finish line in a race or an archery target. He is probably talking about crossing the finish line at the end of life. Living the Christian life is compared to running a race.

**1 Corinthians 9:24-25** <sup>24</sup> Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. <sup>25</sup> And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

**Hebrews 12:1-2** <sup>1</sup> Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

### **3. Believers need to be faithful to God's high calling (vs. 15-16)**

John Bunyan called the story of a Christian's life, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan knew his Bible, and he realized that in this life is a journey toward heaven, and in spite of obstacles and setbacks, the true Christian is making progress toward the destination. This great story reminds us to stay faithful to the end of our journey. That sounds good, but how can we do it?

How can we be more like Paul and more like what God wants us to be? Paul tells us...

#### A. We must be mature in our thinking (vs. 15)

The word "perfect" means mature. We need to be mature and think like Paul thought, and that means we are mature enough to know that we have not reached perfect maturity. Paul said if the believers thought otherwise or different, God would reveal it to them, and this could mean they would have to learn it the hard way through God's discipline.

#### B. We must be consistent in our walk (vs. 16)

The Bible often uses the word "walk" to describe the Christian life. It is something we do every day as a habit or way of life. It involves a starting point and destination. It's never easy. It's not like a walk in the park. Just think one more time about Paul's words in our text...following after, apprehending (laying hold), one thing I do, reaching forth, and pressing toward the mark.

**2 Timothy 4:7** *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*

We honor our graduates today for completing the work and getting their degree, but let's never forget the important thing is not graduation day...it's the process they had to complete day by day, week by week, month by month, year after year. Students are not rewarded when they enter school...they are rewarded when they do the work and finish school. It works the same way in the Christian life...God doesn't reward us when we start living for Christ...it's only when we finish that we will hear those words "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."