

# THE UPWARD CALL

*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.*

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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## **FORGETTING WHAT LIES BEHIND**

[PART 1—ONE THING I DO]

**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.** (Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

Quite some time ago, brothers and sisters in Christ from throughout our region joined hearts together once a month to pray for the city of Richmond. Often, we prayed for the strongholds over our city to be broken. We stood against crime and drugs, an evil that has invaded the youth as it senselessly destroys many lives. We prayed for the church in Richmond to rise up and take possession of the area for Christ. We prayed for unity amongst the brethren. We prayed for the testimony of our Lord in His people. We prayed for the good news of Jesus to go forth. Well, we prayed for many things during that time, and only the Lord knows how much was accomplished in the spiritual realm as we stood strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might, battling the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials.

I recall one day in particular, as I left the time of prayer, I felt frustrated that things did not seem to be changing in our city. I began crying out over the issue and asking the Lord what the issue was. How was I to pray? Over those years, we met in various places to pray, and on this particular day, we met in a very large assembly building located on what is called Monument Avenue, which is lined with many statues of historical figures from the Civil War. As the capital of the Confederacy during the Civil War, Richmond is steeped in history from that era. Obviously, this history, particularly the evil of slavery, and this avenue of monuments are not without controversy. As I cried out for an answer that day, I was staring at a monument of Stonewall Jackson, and I heard in my spirit as if it were audible to my ears: **“Forget the past.”**

It became abundantly clear to me that our city often lives in the past; it is as if, at times, it haunts the present. It is like this dark shadow that clouds the vision of many and keeps them from moving into the light of now, as well as the future. It is even sadder to see some of the Lord’s people living in the past as if they are carrying around heavy baggage that weigh them down. On television, I watch preaching coming from some of the pulpits in Richmond and hear the weight of the past. It is heavy.

Before I share what is on my heart, I want to be clear that I am not against the study of history. It is very important that we study history and learn from it. After all, the Bible itself is vastly historical, among many other things. I don’t believe what the Lord spoke to my heart had to do with ignoring history; what I believe He meant was not to live in the past. There is a big difference between studying the past and living in it, or at least living as if the past were the present. In Richmond, there are groups who dress up in Civil War outfits and reenact great battles that occurred in our area. To some this is like a hobby, a special interest. This may be alright, but if such things spill over into relationships and begin to divide people, then perhaps it is time to reevaluate the whole thing. We as Christians should be reminded of Paul’s word: **So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food** (Romans 14.19-20a). And I will add: Or for the sake of anything else! **Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another** (Romans 13.8).

There are three thoughts that I want to share on forgetting the past that will be covered in this four-part series. The first one deals with Paul's word quoted above about forgetting what lies behind for the goal set before. This requires **vision**. The second one deals with the greatest hindrance to forgetting the past, and that is bitterness. This requires **forgiveness**. The third one deals with moving on or living in peace in the present. This requires **reconciliation**. Before looking at each of these specifically, we need to look at Paul and what forgetting what lies behind meant to him.

Consider Saul (later, Paul) before he met the risen and glorified Jesus on the road to Damascus. He was no slouch amongst the Israelites of his day. By his own admission, he was the cream of the crop. Few could match his pedigree, his zeal to stand for what he knew as a Pharisee, or his righteousness in the Law.

**If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.** (Philippians 3.4-6 NASB)

But when Jesus met him on that road to Damascus and blinded him with His glory, Saul's entire religious view and his confidence in the flesh were turned upside down. Paul started down a path that left his past on that dusty road to Damascus as he pressed on toward a new goal. His declaration was: **Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.**

There are two ways to look back at the past. One is to consider all the good that one has done, and the other is to look at some offense or hurt that was never resolved or healed. Paul was in the first group. He had much to brag about, and surely those of the circumcision would have reminded him of all his good. After all, as Saul, Paul had every reason to be proud of his flesh under Judaism. His confidence in the flesh was seven-fold. *First*, he was no proselyte to the commonwealth of Israel, for he was circumcised on the eighth day, as required. *Second*, he was of the stock of Israel, a son of Abraham according to the blood line of Jacob. *Third*, he was of the tribe of Benjamin, one of the two tribes that held to the house of David, not of one of the ten tribes that became apostate. *Fourth*, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews, meaning that both his father and his mother were Hebrews; he was no mixed breed of Hebrew and gentile as so many were in his day. Then, in regard to his conduct in regard to Moses, he had three more confidences. *Fifth*, in relation to the Law, he was of the Pharisees, who were the orthodox of Judaism, unlike the Sadducees. *Sixth*, as to zeal, he was a persecutor of the church of Christ, which was a badge of honor for an orthodox Jew. *Seventh*, as to righteousness according to the Law, he proved blameless. *Found* blameless, as if blameless in the sight of God is not the intended meaning. Saul was blameless as viewed by the nation of Israel, for he was seen as one who had done all that was required, and he had not transgressed the Law. In other words, when Saul turned from Moses to Christ, he had, so to speak, a clean bill of health under the old covenant.

Paul put it all behind him; he considered it all as loss for the sake of gaining Christ. He saw himself in a race, and anything that weighed him down was thrown off so that he could finish his course and receive the prize that was set before him in the day of Christ. Paul's entire perspective changed dramatically after he met the risen and glorified Christ on the road to Damascus. When his blinded eyes were opened, he had a new goal set before him and, to him, this goal was what mattered most. **But one thing I do!** What was that one thing? It was to forget all his past that had great value according to the flesh. His confidence turned from the flesh and righteousness under the Law to the Person of Christ Jesus who became his righteousness by faith. Counting his past as rubbish and casting it aside, Paul set his sight on running the race in order to win the prize.