

Assess and Evaluate

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[0 : 0 0] let's turn to that chapter that we were reading together let's have a look at some of the things the apostle says in verse 12 philippians chapter 3 and verse 12 not that i page 1181 verse 12 not that i have already obtained this or i'm already perfect but i press on to make it my own because christ jesus has made me his own brothers i do not consider that i've made it my own but one thing i do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead i press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of god in christ jesus several years ago i discovered the benefits of pc banking and despite what they tell us of the dangers about identity fraud and so on i must confess my life would be very different if it hadn't been for pc banking in fact i depend on it heavily the idea is that if you've got a computer and you've got access to the internet you can put in a password you can register with your bank and you can put in a password that's known only to you and a pin number it's known only to you and you can see in an instant your bank account you can see the transactions that have been made the debits and the credits you can see whether you're in debt and how much you're in debt you can see if you're in credit and how much you're in credit you can see what's been happening it's the bills that you've paid or people who have paid you if you're in business or if someone owes you money and so on and so forth you can see it in an instant so you instantly know how things are financially with you you don't have to call up the bank you don't have to go down to the bank you don't have to write to them you used to have to write to them you used to have to go through all kinds of a long and complicated procedure but now you can do it from the comfort of your own home from your own desk or your own dining table or whatever if you've got access to the interviews one of these things that has revolutionized the way that we live and it's the one of these that by which we're able to see in an instant we're able to and the word i'm looking for is evaluate and assess how things are financially with us how things are how healthy or otherwise we are and it's a tremendous benefit to be able to assess how things are and the same is true for the life of the christian and every christian if they really are taking god's word seriously and tell me a christian who doesn't take god's word seriously and that's somebody who's not a healthy christian at all any christian will want to regularly assess his own life and want to evaluate how things are in his own life just the same way as i can evaluate my finances and you can too if you're into internet banking so we're i that encourages us in the same way we're able to assess and evaluate how things are in the life of a christian that's exactly what paul is doing in this chapter he's looking at his own life he's completely uncertain about what his future is he doesn't know for sure what lies ahead of him and yet be on the one hand while he's uncertain of the future exactly how things are going to pan out for him in the future the same way as every one of us nobody knows what the future lies for any one of us yet he lays hold on something he's absolutely certain about and he also has aims and objectives in which he wants to to know and he wants to be able

to make progress in his christian life and he makes that clear to us in the verses that the verses that proceed and in fact we were looking at some of these verses this morning in the seminary in verse eight he says this 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 now here we go in order he said and here's what he's aiming at in order that i may gain christ that doesn't mean he's not saved but when he says that i may gain christ he wants to grow in christ he wants to become more acquainted with jesus he wants to know more about how jesus who jesus is he doesn't know everything the apostle paul didn't know everything neither do we he wants to learn more and more about how god graciously saved him he's not content with just saying well i'm saved that's it i'll just live the rest of my life as if nothing's happened and he's not content to say either he's not content to sit down and to let everything happen he's not a fatalistic christian but he wants to grow in his knowledge of jesus he wants to change he wants to become more like jesus he has

jesus already and yet the more he has the more he wants the more hungry he is and he wants to have he he discovered that not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in christ the righteousness that god that depends on faith that i may know him he said the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings and so on now that was the aim when he looks at his own life he knew he wasn't there just the same way as you can look at your bank account and you can expect to find one thing and you discover that things are not as you expected it the same way is when you assess and evaluate your own life you perhaps expect something you expect to make more progress than you do when you look at your life and you honestly you ask yourself where am i how are things in my christian life and you discover they're not what they should be well i hope it'll encourage you to know that that's exactly what the apostle discovered for himself verse 12 says this not that i have already obtained this and you know the apostle could have said that at any stage in his christian life as long as he lived in this world he as as long as every time he looked honestly at his own life he would have to say exactly the same thing not that i have already obtained this you know there's something proper and right in being dissatisfied the moment we become satisfied with our christian lives the moment we start sitting back and saying everything is just as it should be then that's the moment of danger and that's certainly not the apostle's motto at all he's saying i know what i should be and i'm not there but i also know that there is an unchanging truth that lies at the heart of who i am as a christian that will make sure that one day i will be there and that is what he tells us at the end of verse verse 12 because christ jesus has made me his own that is an unchanging truth that every christian can say christ has made me his own he made us his own because he purchased us with his own blood on the cross he bought us we have been redeemed says the bible by the precious blood of jesus now that is a key statement

that makes the difference between paul's determination to continue as a christian or or whether he despairs as he looks to the future you know some people when they find imperfection they despair i suppose every one of us is different but there are some people who are perfectionists and they can't cope with anything that isn't perfect there are other people that can cope too well with imperfection they're lazy they're not really interested in perfection and they're quite they can they're quite happy with any the state of anything be at their house or whatever but paul knows the balance between the two paul is paul is absolutely determined to continue in his christian life even although he knows that his christian life is not what it should be therefore he says i press on to make it my own now i want us to look this evening just very briefly at three things the three things that he says in verse in verse 13 one thing he says i do first of all he forgets what lies behind all right he forgets what lies behind that is the past so what he's telling us is that he's getting over the past first thing that he wants to do is get over the past then he strains forward to what lies ahead then thirdly verse 14 he presses on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of god in christ jesus let's look at the first of these things paul and the past the first thing he wants to do or the aims to do is to what he says is forgetting the past now he's not he's not talking about some power that he has to delete the past to delete every semblance of memory that he might have we can't do that nobody can do that i know that some of us have good memories and other ones have i suffer from a terrible memory especially names and faces sometimes people sometimes i meet people i know and i can't remember their names just momentarily it happens to me all the time some of you know that everybody's got different memories some of us have good long-term memories and we can look back into the past years and years and we can recall times and dates and places and every detail of what happened 20 30 40 50 years ago it's incredible the way some people can almost write their history on a book as if it happened today some people have got a tremendous memory other people have got an absolutely hopeless memory for long term or even short term but the one thing we can't do is to forget just deliberately we can't hit the delete button and everything goes blank in the past you just simply can't do that so when paul says forgetting what lies behind he's not talking about some ability that he has to just erase everything in his past what he's saying is this i'm going to leave it behind i have learned to leave it behind now that is of enormous importance in the progress or in the christian life i suppose if we were to reveal if each one of us tonight were to reveal what lay in our past it would be a very interesting story for most of us i suppose it's a mixture of good and bad of the pleasant and the ugly for some of us for some people going back in the past is an is a painful experience and for them they would love for that past never to have happened we read about this all the time we come across people who have had a very cruel past a bad upbringing a bringing an upbringing where

there's sadness and betrayal where the very things that should have happened in a person's childhood and would have would have given rise to a healthy childhood didn't happen where someone who ought to have been trusted betrayed that trust and that person has grown up with a scarred memory and even a scarred personality some people that your personality depends so much i'm not saying that we can blame everything on the past but what we are today is so much dependent on the way in which each of us have been brought up some of us have been brought up in good stable homes other people haven't but the problem is that when a person becomes a christian how does he deal with that past if it's an ugly past how does he deal with that because the bible tells him that he has been raised to newness of life the person he is today is not the person that he once was and yet the past is still the past his memories are still there sometimes as fresh as they ever were in his mind and for some people they they they have fallen into the habit of dwelling on the past now the same can happen on the other side of the story when when there are things in your memory that are so pleasant you keep going back to them and you keep saying to you saying to yourself i wish things were the way they were you know sometimes this happens when a person gets to a certain age he finds himself dwelling and things on his youth on his school days and his friends and he knew i wonder what happened to this fellow wonder what happened to that fellow and the pleasant memories that you had and the people you knew and you begin to spend more and more time and all of these things and for some people goes a step further and they actually wish they were back there and they start living in the past and it's a sign of not being able to cope with the present whatever difficulties there might be whatever uncertainties there might be and we retreat back into better days days that we knew and days that we felt were more secure for us and for some people it gets even worse than that because they actually begin to ask i wonder what would have happened if i had made a different decision if i had taken these four subjects in school instead of the subjects that i took if i had studied this instead of studying that if i had gone out with this girl instead of going out with the person i married and if i had decided on this job instead of deciding on the job that i decided upon i wonder how things would have been and for many people that's again a retreat into the past for paul his past was was extraordinary paul grew up an exemplary life you remember his name before he became soul of churches before he became paul the apostle he was soul of tarsus paul was a soul of tarsus was a model child he never it doesn't appear that he rebelled in any way whatsoever he was taught god's law from the time that he was young he tells us here in this very chapter he says i was circumcised on the eighth day i was if ever you could find an example of someone who might be able to win and earn the love of god by doing things and by doing god's will it's me his past was full of good things no regrets absolutely no regret every one of us here have got regrets i've got regrets of the past there are things i wish i didn't hadn't done i still have regrets i do things and when he when he talks about the past here when he talks about what lies behind he's not necessarily talking about 20 years ago he might be talking about yesterday we get into a conversation you say something you say why did i say that how can i get over that and it plagues you sometimes these things plague you and they come back to you time and time again and they wear you down examine your own heart examine your life and ask to what extent does my past dominate my thinking and who i am and you'll find you'll get a real discovery you'll really discover something something very strange now look at paul there was absolutely no regrets in his life at all he'd been brought up as a jew he was circumcised the eighth day of the people of israel of the tribe of benjamin a hebrew of the hebrews there was nobody more pure than he was by birth by pedigree as to the law of pharisee as to zeal of persecuting the church as to righteousness under how many of us could say this as to righteousness under god's law blameless in other words when he was taught the ten commandments as a child he didn't just learn them off by heart he decided in his heart i'm going to live by these commandments and he made it his ambition when he was a young man to live by those commandments and so as far as he was concerned keeping of the sabbath day was absolutely perfect that was his aim honoring his father and mother absolutely perfect that was his aim not taking the lord's name in vain absolutely perfect not hurting someone not killing not stealing not committing adultery that was his aim because he believed that by keeping god's law he could win his way and earn his way into the kingdom of god and to be right with god that's what the pharisees did now you would think that having stored up all this merit having stored up all these points points and that's what we're talking about a point system you know you go into the supermarket sometimes and the girl says to you do you have a club card and if you've got a club card you take your card out and she puts it in the machine and the machine tells her how many points you have and the more points you have the more benefits there are so

that if you shop more at the supermarket you earn points therefore you gain something in return for the points you've earned that's the way paul was that's what he thought of his that's what the apostle paul thought that's how he lived and so his points card it was full to the brim of points you couldn't get more points than saul of tarsus you know what he does with his card once he met jesus on the road to damascus he ripped it up and he said everything that i have earned is absolute garbage you know why because no matter how hard i've tried in my past it's done me no good whatsoever in winning the love and the favor of god it hasn't done a scrap for me you know it must be an awful discovery isn't it that to know that your whole life lived diligently and blamelessly has got you nowhere isn't he spent years years of his life trying his best he was the most religious man that ever walked the face of the earth until the day that he met with jesus and that day he discovered he was the biggest sinner in the whole world and there was only one place he could find forgiveness there was only one way in which his life could be right with god and that was by jesus christ and there was only one righteousness that he could possibly have and that was god's righteousness given to him paid into his account so what he needed was a new card a card that didn't earn him anything but a card into which god paid in full by jesus that's what it means to be a christian and every one of us has to come to that point where we

[20 : 26] have to confess to god that we have been slaves to sin even if we thought we were on the right road and even if we thought we were doing doing the right thing and doing our best for god that we have to come to the point where we discover that our lives are nothing but rubbish before god and god that's the point at which god shows us the greatness of the gospel in jesus christ so that was paul's past a past that was full of achievements and yet as far as he was concerned he was going to leave it behind he was going to leave it behind and that is what every christian must do we have to know how to cope with the past whatever lies therein some people are angry with god because of events that have taken place in their past some people want to live way back then and can't cope with a world that's full of change the certainty of the gospel demands that we leave it behind and that and there was only one way in which the apostle could leave it behind and that was what he says secondly straining forward straining forward to what lies ahead in other words the way that the apostle was able to face and to cope with what lay in the past whether they be days or years was to face the front and to cope with and to rather to to strain towards and i suppose if if this verse was put in driving language it would be mean this instead of being in reverse gear we must be in forward gear we must head in the right direction we must put make every effort in our christian lives to focus on what god has prepared for his people what lies in the future because god's people have a future and work towards that now notice i said work towards it not work for it there's a difference between working towards something and working for it none of us can work for heaven and yet every one of us in jesus we're able to work towards heaven by living our lives every day for him and by by doing what the apostle said and that i may gain christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that i may know him and the power of his resurrection if i can go to the to history again they tell us that what takes place now is a result of what took place in days gone by whether they be days or years or centuries so life as it is now is a result of of what took place going back hundreds of years that's why they tell us history is so important because what we are and what we see in the world around us today is a result of what's taken place over decades and that's absolutely true but what paul is telling us here is this that we in our christian lives must model ourselves on what must be modeled on what lies in the future now how can that possibly be because god has prepared and planned a certain future for all of his people he tells us that's why we're going through revelation at the moment because the message of revelation is the certainty of what god has prepared for you and i

and the certainty of the coming of jesus kingdom but what paul is saying here is i'm not going to just content myself on a life which is the result of what's happened in the past but i am going to live my life focused and oriented on what god is planning for the future and i'm going to keep my eye on it and i'm going to make every effort my goal my objective in my life is to strain towards that place how much do we orientate our lives towards the future tonight how much does it figure in our thinking how much do we think about the future that god has for his people it should be the greatest promise in all the world it should be the finest the most precious truth in all the world and yet how much of it does how much of it dominates our thinking much do we how much time do we give to thinking about god's certain future our lives not taken up with all the wrong things even when they're quite legitimate in themselves they're so we're so full and i'm talking to myself as well i'm a

confessing that i'm as bad as anyone or so are so we're so full with what's going on at the moment and we give so little time to thinking about what god well that wasn't the way it was with the apostle paul and that's why these words are there so that we can listen to the apostle and by so doing we listen to god because what the apostle is saying here is god's word to us and what he did god is commanding us to do as well so that's the second thing he does he strains forward to what lies ahead but then thirdly he presses on and look at what he presses on for and towards the goal for the prize of the high calling of god let's look first of all at what he presses on towards towards the goal for the mark for the prize of the high calling of god i want you to notice the language that he uses the goal it's translated here as the goal but those of you are familiar with the av the old authorized version will know that it's the mark the mark of the high calling of god the word in in the greek language i don't often say this but i'll say it this time because i think it's quite obvious what it means the word for this word goal or mark is this skopos scope let's take away the s scope scope scope you know what a scope is you know what a telescope is you know what you how you use a telescope it's an instrument that you use and you lengthen it telescopic and you look through it and you can see when you look through it you can see i remember i had an uncle who lived down in lochs and he used to get a massive great great telescope and he was able to see right across the right across the bay to where this the hills and he was able to see deer and stags roaming the hills and he used to try and get us to see it and i couldn't see a thing except except just green and brown and but he could see these there's no way you could see it with the naked eye no way all you could see was tiny little dots in the distance but these dots were made clear through the telescope all right now that's what god has declared he has prepared a future for all of his people a certain do you know you ever think of this just as certain as you and i are here tonight by the grace of god it's god that has put us into this world god has given us our personalities our faces our bodies our homes our the time in which we were born it's god that has given us our identity god has placed us in this world and for us this world is reality all right now have you ever thought that just as for us this world is reality so god is able to create another reality a future reality one which we cannot describe in human language you know what i said i'm going to say something tonight that god is unable now watch what i say i'm not speaking irreverently it is impossible for us to understand in ordinary human language what god has prepared for his people and that's why for paul it's only a mark it's only a goal it's something he can't see clearly and it's something that he needs a telescope to see and so what's the telescope the telescope is god's promises god's word and every time we come to what god's word we're reminded that our future in jesus is absolutely secure in him and life is not just an endless round of activities for christians going nowhere but life is a journey from start to finish there's a starting point and there is a finishing point and god has planned and predetermined when that finishing point will be where it will be and he'll not a moment too soon and not a moment too late he will call us the high calling of god that's what he says he will call us one day to himself we will be with christ and to be with christ paul says is far better we have to believe that by faith life for the christian is not an endless circle it seems that way sometimes but it's not it's a starting point and a finishing point we had used to have a we used to have a hamster and uh we put it in a cage and there was a wheel in the in the in the cage and you'd come in and you'd see this hamster sometimes at five o'clock in the morning the wheel would have a squeak on it and it would drive you around the bend because he would get up at the most unearthly hour and the first thing he would do is to start running on this wheel and he would run and run and run and run for what seemed to be an eternity he would just run and he was going nowhere poor thing didn't know it no idea for him it's just exercise if you don't have christ that's what you're doing your life is full of endless activity and you're taking pleasure in it while it lasts it's going nowhere perhaps i shouldn't have said that perhaps i'm wrong in saying that because we are going somewhere we're all going somewhere if you don't have christ it's a lost eternity bible makes it clear there's no two ways about it lost eternity but for the person who's in jesus every day is significant that's why paul says i press on because for him there was no such thing as mundane routine you know there's something very mundane and routine about ordinary life isn't it and very often it wears us down doing the same things day by day cleaning the same dishes hoovering the floor cleaning the kids looking after them going out to work doing the same things same day after day and sometimes it appears we're going nowhere but for a christian that is not the case there's something mundane about pressing on i press on i live day by day for jesus because it's jesus that gives significance and meaning and purpose in our lives i press on means the discipline of a christian life a healthy christian life you

cannot be a healthy christian without being disciplined i press on do you know the whole the whole picture in this passage is someone who's running a race and we have to we have to imagine that we are running a race that's the picture that paul gives to us and that's the picture of the christian a christian not sitting in an armchair letting letting it all happen but someone who's on the racetrack with his goal in mind not looking back they tell me that this passage might have been a chariot race do you know the worst thing you can do when you're racing chariots i'm sure there's nobody's ever raced a chariot in here you know the worst thing you could do is racing a chariot looking back disaster guaranteed disaster you've got to keep your eye on the front on the goal on the prize on the high calling of god that's the only way it's not that there's only one person going to win the race and everybody else is going to lose that's not it but that we still have to press on towards the mark of the prize the high calling of god knowing that in christ we are secure are you in the race are you in the race i really hope you are have you started the race have you come to the lord jesus just the same as the apostle did surrendered everything to him only by coming to him you will know that security for yourself let's pray father bless your world to us once again we ask pray that it will fill our minds this evening that we'll go back to it that we'll remember it that it will speak to us and live in our souls we ask lord that you will forgive us for the way in which we have failed in so many different ways we ask lord that you will teach us how to leave a past behind straining forward to what lies ahead and pressing on towards the goal the prize of the high calling of god in him we ask in jesus name amen