

JUNE 20, 1993

KEEP ON KEEPING ON

There are many events in life that are packed with significance. We recently attended a high school graduation in which my wife's niece was a participant. This event was filled with a lot of ceremony and would appear to mark the conclusion of a part of these young people's lives. There are many weddings happening this time of the year and a lot of preparation and money goes into making the event memorable and significant. We see young people and sometimes adults making decisions for Christ and the event is marked with a baptism ceremony. There is a tendency to think of such events as "ends unto themselves." That is, we go to school so that we can graduate, we date and court our future spouse so that we can get married, and we accept Jesus as our Savior so that we can be justified before God. All these significant events are important and it is right and proper that they be marked with ceremony and made memorable; however, the proper perspective is that these are beginnings and not ending. Graduation is the start of a new phase of life that leads to more responsibility and independence, marriage is the beginning of a new and growing in-depth relationship between two people that is to be uniquely theirs, and a decision for Christ is the beginning of a new and growing relationship with God that will change everything in that **we** become new and old things pass away.

When we enter a new phase of life, the old phase still has its allure and we still have its habits. Young people that have graduated from high school tend to want to go back and hold on to the relationships that they had. This tendency eventually goes away as new relationships and friendship develop. People that are newly married sometimes still behave as if they were still single. This is especially true with some men. They spend all their free time with the old gang, hunting, fishing, playing golf and a lot of other things that does not include their wives. In the same way, a new Christian will have a tendency to hold on to the old life with its world view and interpretations. Many Christians still have the tendency to think that they have to do something to be acceptable to God rather than rely on His grace. Paul found the tendency to depend on keeping the law and the ceremony for salvation to be a problem in the early church.

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-3 What did Paul mean by "Finally, my brethren rejoice in the Lord." In the final analysis, all rejoicing that we have must be based on what we have in Christ Jesus. We are not to put any confidence in the flesh - the old carnal nature. There were people who were teaching that it was necessary for the Gentile to become Jews in practice before they could be saved. Specifically, they were put-ting emphasis on circumcision. Paul warned the church at Philippi to be on the look out for these people whom he described as dogs. Paul realized that the circumcision practice was symbolic of the cutting off of the fleshly nature and that the spiritual reality had nothing to do with the Jewish rite of circumcision. Our confidence and rejoicing are to be in Jesus and nothing else.

PHILIPPIANS 3:4-6 The problem with trusting in the flesh or our own ability is that we never know when we are "good" enough. If anyone could have confidence in worldly achievements, then Paul would have had it made. Paul was one of those people who did all the right things, he went to the right schools, was proper in his religion, was highly moral and had enthusiasm and really applied himself to whatever he did. He had tons of self esteem, but none of it was adequate when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus.

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11 When we compare ourselves with the world, then we can come to the conclusion that we are pretty hot stuff. We may be smart, rich and good looking and think, "What else is there?" We'll be lulled into a sense of self satisfaction and live a life that does no one any good if we do not encounter Jesus. When Paul met Jesus it turned his life inside out and upside down. All those things that he had worked so hard to achieve, could now be seen in the light of Jesus and they were worthless. Isaiah came to the same conclusion when he encounter the Lord in the Temple. His conclusion was that his own righteousness was as filthy rags. Paul saw all his degrees and honors and recognition to be lost so that he might win Christ. The key to the Christian life is to be in Christ while the key to Christian living to have Christ in us.

Paul had discovered that he could not do anything to earn righteousness and be acceptable

with God. Our righteousness is not what God wants to find in us, He wants to find His own righteousness in us. This is righteousness that God imputes to us when we place our faith in Him. When we are placed in Christ, then we grow in the know-ledge of the Lord Jesus and know Him more and more. As we share in His righteousness and holiness we come to experience His power in our lives. As we let Him live out His life in us, then we experience the rejection and the suffering that He experienced and we daily die to self as we identify with Christ and His death on the cross. If we never die to self, then we will never experience the resurrection that Jesus promised.

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14 The goal for every Christian is to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. This change is not something that happens instantaneously but is a process and is an on-going one that never ends. Quite simply put, we are to become what God intended us to be when He redeemed us by the blood of Jesus. This is what Paul meant when he said that he wanted to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of him. Paul was still growing in Christ and he was not interested in looking back on all that he had been or accomplished, but was fixing his vision on God's goal for him. One reason so many Christians don't grow is that they have no idea that they are supposed to grow. They do not realize that God's intent for each of us is to find fulfillment in the Kingdom of God and not in this world.

PHILIPPIANS 3:15-16 Time after time we are admonished to grow up or to become mature in our Christian walk. The things about which Paul was writing are things that a mature Christian should understand. Some-times we experience things in our life that are simply God's dealing with us to help bring us to a proper understanding of these truths. When we lose sight of the goal, then God intervenes to bring us back to the path of righteousness. The bottom line is that we should live out all that has been revealed to us regard-ing righteousness and holiness. Fail-ure to live up to what we know will hinder our further development. God doesn't take us to lesson seven until we have learned lesson six and put it into practice.

We are to press on in our walk with Christ and not ever do less than our best: that is the essence of the idea of "Keep on Keeping On."