

Philippians 3:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

Analysis

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before (ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ ἐμαυτὸν οὐ λογίζομαι κατεληφέναι· ἐν δέ, τὰ μὲν ὀπίσω ἐπιλανθανόμενος τοῖς δὲ ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος, adelphoi, egō emauton ou logizomai kateilēphenai; hen de, ta men opisō epilanthanomenos tois de emprosthen epekteinomenos)—Adelphoi ("brothers") marks solemnity. Ou logizomai kateilēphenai ("I do not count myself to have apprehended") reinforces v. 12's humility. Hen de ("but one thing")—singular focus. Two participles describe this focus: epilanthanomenos ("forgetting") ta opisō ("things behind")—past achievements/failures don't define; epekteinomenos ("stretching forward") tois emprosthen ("things ahead")—like runner straining toward finish. This athletic imagery (common in Paul: 1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Tim 4:7) pictures focused, forward-oriented pursuit. No looking back—only pressing ahead.

Historical Context

Ancient athletic contests (Olympics, Isthmian games) were prominent in Greco-Roman culture. Runners trained intensely, raced naked to minimize drag, stretched toward finish line. Paul applies this to Christian life: singular focus, abandoning past, straining forward. Forgetting 'things behind' includes both pre-conversion credentials (vv. 5-6) and post-conversion achievements—neither define identity or destiny. Only Christ and His call matter (v. 14).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What 'things behind' (past sins or successes) do you need to forget to press forward?
2. How does 'one thing I do' challenge cultural multitasking and divided attention?
3. What does 'stretching forward' (epekteinomenos) look like practically in pursuing Christ?

Interlinear Text

ἀδελφοί	ἐγὼ	ἐμαυτὸν	οὐ	λογίζομαι	κατειληφέναι·
Brethren	I	myself	not	count	to have apprehended
G80	G1473	G1683	G3756	G3049	G2638
ἐν	δὲ	τὰ	μὲν	ὀπίσω	ἐπιλανθανόμενος
this one thing	and	those things	which are behind	I do forgetting	
G1520	G1161	G3588	G3303	G3694	G1950
τοῖς	δὲ	ἔμπροσθεν	ἐπεκτεινόμενος		
and	those things which are before	reaching forth unto			
G3588	G1161	G1715	G1901		

Additional Cross-References

Luke 9:62 (Parallel theme): And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Philippians 3:12 (Parallel theme): Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Psalms 27:4 (Parallel theme): One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.

Philippians 3:8 (Parallel theme): Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

Hebrews 6:1 (Parallel theme): Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

Philippians 2:12 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Luke 10:42 (Parallel theme): But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

2 Peter 3:8 (Parallel theme): But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Psalms 45:10 (Parallel theme): Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;

2 Corinthians 5:16 (Parallel theme): Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.