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Pressing On Series

## S4.E6. The Upward Call

Phil. 3.12-16 *“<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the goal for the prize of the ‘**upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**’*

*<sup>15</sup>Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. <sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.”*

That phrase, **“the upward call of God”** is at the center of this passage of scripture and is at the core of the context of the scripture. In other words, the term **“the upward call”** throws light on the surrounding verses and helps to explain the verses before and after its use. The

entire passage hinges on the proper understanding of this phrase, *the upward call or high calling of God*.

Because it is stated, *“the upward call ‘of God,’”* it is clear the one who is doing the calling is God the Father. And to whom is He calling, and why or for what purpose is He calling? These and other questions need answering. And to answer it we must consider the following three verses which will shed light on these questions.

Jn. 6.44 *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me **draws** him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

Phil. 3.14 *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward **call** of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Jn. 14.6 *“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

**Drawing and Calling.** In the first two verses we see the action of the Father towards man: He first of all *“draws”* man **“to”** Christ to enter into the salvation process, and the second action the Father *“calls”* those born into His family to a higher purpose. The drawing is not by force or coercion, only by a divine invitation to enter God’s plan for and eternal life, Jn. 3.16-19.

*“ 16For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

This invitation may well come from the power of the presentation of the Gospel itself, with the influence of God’s Spirit having a persuading influence upon the soul, inclining it to be willing and obedient, but not by constraint. The result of responding positively to the *draw* of God **“to”** Christ is a regeneration of the spirit of man, being “born again” of God.

The Second action is the *“calling”* of God which to those born-again believers “in” Christ to come up higher. Here, and elsewhere in the New Testament, *“klesis”* primarily refers to a divine calling or invitation, particularly in the context of God’s call to individuals to enter into a relationship and fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ—as noted in Jn. 14.6., *“No one comes to the Father except through Me (Jesus).”*

The divine purpose for both the *drawing* and *calling* of God is to restore the relationship and fellowship lost in the unrighteous disobedience of Adam; and that it might be fully restored through the righteous obedience of His Son. 1 Cor. 15.22 *“22For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”* All death and suffering and isolation from God in man today may be traced to the sin of Adam. However, through the obedience of Christ in His sacrificial

dearth, burial, and resurrection, all that are “in Him,” come alive spiritually “in Him.” They have 1 Jn. 3.14 “*passed from death into life*” “in Him,” with the promise of being raised from the dead unto eternal life “in Him.”

The phrase “in Him” is 100% spiritually oriented and is a mystery of God now revealed by the Holy Spirit. As all future generations were and are now in Adam, and Noah was in the ark, and God’s presence was in the temple, so is the believer in Him, in Christ; it is of great magnitude and significance.

The results of Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection negate all the results of Adam’s fall and are extended to all men and women as an invitation to restoration in relationship with God our Father. But, the individual’s responsibility rests upon the will of each person as to what they prefer—whether it be that natural life of self-determination he derives from Adam, or a newly regenerated life derived from Christ—the choice is ours to make, to remain planted in the “offence” of Adam living one’s natural life, or responding to the *draw* and *calling* of “*grace*” of God in Christ.

## High Calling and Predestination

The “**high call**” of God, properly, the “**calling from above,**” or the “**upward call,**” or even the “**heavenly calling,**” are different translations of the same thought. This is an upward call of God to initiate movement in our spiritual life towards His ultimate purpose. This calling is directed from the Father to those whom He “**predestinated**” to that purpose. It is written, Rm. 8.30 “*Moreover whom He **predestined**, these He also **called**; whom He **called**, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*” This verse of scripture, like every other verse in the Bible, requires elaboration for proper understanding.

The call of God the Father is to those “*predestinated.*” This term might bother you at first because it seems to imply God interfering with man’s free-will, like God pre-determining who would be saved and who would not be saved. But it does not mean that at all or imply that in any manner. Putting this same word, “*predestination*” into another verse as in Eph. 1.5, it reads, “*having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,*” Do you see here, that the word “predestined” has nothing at all to do with a call “**to**” salvation but has everything to do with a call “**in**” salvation. Here, it is affirmed, that each and every believer who is presently “**in Christ**” is now predestined to grow up spiritually in some measure, not to remain as a babe, but to mature as “*sons*” of God.

Biblically there is a clear distinction between a “*child*” who is immature in thought and behavior and a “*son*” who has matured towards being conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ; very importantly, the *son* begins to function in the purposes of the Father with less concern for his worldly life. The following two scriptures make this distinction between *child* and *son*: in Rm. 8, **14** “*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are **sons** (Gk. *huios*) of God.*”

and in the following verse **16** “*The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s **children** (Gk. *teknon*.)*” Do you see and understand that there is a difference?

To further emphasize this distinction between a *child* and a *son*, it is written that believers are “born again” as *children (teknon)* of God, as in Jn. 1.12 “**12** *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children (teknon) of God, to those who believe in His name: 13* *who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” However, they are never intended to remain as mere children but to mature in Christ-like stature, as in Rm. 8.14 once again, “**14** *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*”

Thus, the “**high calling**” or “**upward call**” of God is made to those who are already born *children* of God—those who have responded to the “*draw*” of the Father to receive the Spirit of His Son into their hearts. This is a heavenly call to maturity and spiritual stature as *sons* of God and to co-embrace with the Son the purposes of the Father. If we are now in relationship with Him as His born children, then we must learn fellowship with Him as mature Sons of God. This “*high call*” of God is to those who are “**in Christ**,” but only to be preceded by the “*drawing*” of God “**to Christ** in the first place. *Drawing* and subsequent *calling*” is with God’s ultimate purpose in mind for man to be being reconciled to Him for the fulfilling of His divine purpose of fellowship, the fellowship lost in the Garden through the unrighteous act of disobedience in Adam but now restored by the single act of righteous obedience in Christ.

**Discipline**— The sons of God are not without discipline. There are two sides to discipline; the first is training in obedience; the second are various kinds of correction. It is written, Heb. 12.7-8,

*“If you endure chastening (discipline), God deals with you as with **sons** (huios); for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening (discipline), of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.”*

Note, it is written here of divine discipline relating to “*sons*,” not “*children*.” We must first think beyond the “*rod of discipline*.” This kind of corrective measure might be suitable for young “*children*,” as it is written, Prov. 22.15 “*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him;*” but not so for the “*son*.” For him (or her) this New Testament word refers to the process of training and educating, particularly in the context of moral and spiritual maturity. It includes both the “*corrective*” discipline when appropriate in severe cases and “*instructive*” discipline aiming to “*cultivate*” virtue and godliness. To “*cultivate*” is to nurture and help to grow; there is a holy nature implanted in the believer, it is “*inborn*” in every child of God but requires divine cultivation for growth. Note particularly 2 Pet. 1.3-4,

*“ 3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the l corruption that is in the world through lust.”*

In saying, “*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,*” two things stand out: first, God does not supply this *life and godliness* as automatic maturity, but He does supply us with a new spirit that, in union with His Spirit, feeds upon that essence of *life and godliness*. This new nature is resident in every child of God and is in need of nurturing and cultivation. The second principle here is that the word “*all,*” as in “*His divine power has given to us all things,*” is emphatic, meaning any and “all” things necessary for *life and godliness*. He withholds nothing; but “all” things emphatically are of God, by God, and through God by the joint working of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2 Pet. 1-4 continues to read that such nurturing comes, “*through the knowledge of Him.*” Such knowledge of God is gained only by spiritual fellowship with Him. This particular word “*knowledge*” refers to a deep, thorough and precise knowledge of God our Father. It implies a full understanding and discernment that goes beyond mere factual awareness. More specifically, it denotes a spiritual insight that is given by God to those in fellowship with Him—an insight and discernment that reveals His will, His nature, and purpose.

Note must also be made of the goal of God’s inward working power, and that is “*you may be partakers of the divine nature.*” I wish to share with you from a scholarly commentary on this Bible verse, (MacLarens Expositions), he writes,

“‘*Partakers of the Divine nature.*’ These are bold words and may be so understood as to excite the wildest and most presumptuous dreams. But bold as they are, and startling as they may sound to some of us, they are only putting into other language the teaching of which the whole New Testament is full, that men may, and do, by their faith, receive into their spirits a real communication of the life of God. What else does the language about being ‘the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty’ mean? What else does the teaching of regeneration mean? What else means Christ’s frequent declarations that He dwells in us and we in Him, as the branch in the vine, as the members in the body? What else does ‘He that is joined to the Lord in one spirit’ mean? Do not all teach that in some most real sense the very purpose of Christianity, for which God has sent His Son and His Son has come, is that we, poor, sinful, weak, limited, ignorant creatures as we are, may be lifted up into that solemn and awful elevation, and receive in our trembling and yet strengthened souls a spark of God? ‘*That ye may be partakers of the Divine nature*’ means more than ‘that you may share in the blessings which that nature bestows.’ It means that into us may come the very God Himself.” (Underline mine.)

Never before in the history of mankind, from Adam until the cross, could anyone write, as Jam. 4.8 “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you,*” and write it with any degree of validity of truth and of anticipation of its reality. And Col. 1.27 “*Christ in you the hope of glory.*” In Christ divine fellowship has been restored. This is the purpose, the goal, the grand objective of the “***upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***”

**Pressing On**

**Attained and Perfected**— Returning now to the whole of our opening scripture passage Phil. 3.12-16, we may now better understand Paul's passionate cry, "*12Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*" A distinction must be made here between the words "*attain*" and "*perfected.*" To "*attain*" or to receive is a single act, as to have achieved the goal. But Paul does not boast of attaining anything; he rather refers to not being "*perfected,*" a word that implies a continuous process, perhaps keeping in mind what he wrote earlier in this letter to the Philippian church, Phil. 1.6, "*Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" In this life we may "*attain*" regeneration, being born of the seed of Christ. That is factual and "*punctiliar,*" relating to a particular time in your life in which you received the Spirit of Christ into your heart and were born again.

But perfection is progressive, ongoing towards a goal. It is like the writer of Hebrews writing in verse 6.1, "*1Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, ...*" or better, "*let us press onwards to perfection,*" or let us mature in knowledge and understanding like those who are of "*full age.*" (Heb. 5.14) Thus, our understanding of the word "*perfection*" lies not in a state of being free from all flaws or defects, but of a state of moving towards being complete or mature. It implies reaching towards a goal, fulfilling a purpose, particularly in the context of spiritual maturity.

**"That I may lay hold of that"**— Consider now the remainder of verse 3.12, "*I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*" There is something compelling in which we all must share, and share alike, and that is in the groaning of Paul's soul, "*that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*" Other versions use the word "*apprehend*" in place of "*lay hold of.*" Christ lays hold of us, or apprehends us, for a divine purpose; and now there is a relentless groaning in our hearts to apprehend that very purpose for our souls, to not slack or let up; rather in all the fatigue and pain in running the race, the goal is in view, and now is the time to run with all endurance the race before us. There is desperation in his words, not to fail or come up short of the high call of God in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes people do things out of habit or are compelled to do out of simple obedience to a command from a higher authority. And sometimes, as I believe is the case here, it is doing something out of a shared sense of Godly purpose— purpose can apprehend you, this grand intention of God working in Christ towards the fulfillment of His will in me.

*"28Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Mt. 11.28-29*

As we claim the oneness with Christ in His life, and death, in His crucifixion, death and burial, in His resurrection and ascension into heaven, we now share in that oneness of purpose for the completion of all God's plans and will for our ultimate relationship and fellowship with Him

extending into eternity. And this is accomplished in and by our rest in Christ, for without Him we can do nothing.

**“Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead I press towards the goal...”** There is a saying, “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it,” (Winston Churchill?) meaning is if we don’t study and learn from the mistakes of the past, we are likely to make the same mistakes again. While this is largely true not only on the world event scene but also in examining our own lives, and indeed we should; however, the phrase no longer holds true when running to the finish line, that is, pressing towards the goal of our high calling. This is the time to not look back at what had been, or to examine the mistakes of our past, or even to focus on our current position in the race of life. This is the time to focus intently on the “goal” that is set before us, the finish line, better yet, on the One who is the standard of our faith, the one to whom we measure all things, Jesus Christ.

Heb. 12.2 *“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”*

Make no mistake or wrong understanding about this, “looking unto the author and perfecter of our faith makes no reference to have pictures, paintings, and icons close by; it has nothing to do with physical glances or stares at divine images or wearing crosses or displaying other religious paraphernalia. In *“looking unto Jesus”* we are looking away from all things that surround and distract from the sole focus, and to fix our gaze on the “resurrected” Christ. Paul had written in 2 Cor. 5.16,

2 Cor. 5.16 *Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.”*

This verse meaning that we must no longer strive to see or hear Him in any natural way, or to consider only His natural life upon the earth ending in His crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and ascension; we now only know Him as He has a glorified resurrected body, and is sitting at the right hand of the Father in glory, and power, and authority. He now has no earthly limitations or acknowledgements or claims of notoriety. Christ is not regarded in the light of earthly relationships or fellowship, but is the risen, glorified, eternal Savior. We must now gaze upon Him in a spiritual sense, as the one in whom we abide, and He abides in us. (Jn. 15.5)—that is a most powerful, spiritual, revelation that must impact us in ways above and beyond all we can ask or think: it is Christ in me and me in Christ. Perhaps the most compelling verse that unveils the power of this spiritual fixation on Christ, and the import of our relationship and fellowship with Him, is,

2 Cor. 3.18 *“<sup>18</sup>But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

If my body, soul, or spirit is altered in any way, I am being “transformed”; if my spirit comes alive to God in a new way, I am being transformed; if my character begins to change and

there appears Godly fruit in my life, I am being transformed; if in subtle ways I begin to be led of the Spirit, I am being transformed; if I worship in spirit and truth, I am being transformed; if I am overtaken with the love of God, I am being transformed; if I feel apprehended to do things, as in service of ministry, even though completely out of my comfort zone, and at great cost or sacrifice, I am being transformed; and when this body has run its course, and sleeps in death, and it resurrects into newness of life and vitality, then I will be transformed into His likeness. Now, to complete the Philippian passage in closing,

*15Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.*

#### **S4.E5 Questions for Discussion**

1. It is written here that to enter the race in salvation one must qualify for it and be invited to run in it. Explain.
2. In Heb. 12. 1-2, distinguish between every “*weight*” and “*sin*” that may ensnare us.
3. Discuss the importance of being “disqualified” in our race. How serious is it? What does it mean to be “set aside”?
4. How secure is our salvation in Christ. How do scriptures 1 Cor. 5.4-5 and 1 Cor. 3.11-15 relate to this question?
5. Explain Col. 3.3, and specifically how it may relate to our finding our rest in Christ...even though running the race.