



This, But, That

This week we are moving into a section of verses that could be familiar to you. Because of that, you may be able to memorize them easier, but more than that, I hope the Lord brings them alive to you in a fresh way. The Word of God is so rich for us. May we continue to hold it up high in our lives!

So let's jump right in here with verse 12. You might remember being in school and having to focus on vocabulary words. Perhaps your teacher gave you a list of words and asked you to define them for your homework. Well I am going to give you a list today also. There are only three words on the list, but they are very important. The three words are this, but and that. This week our verse says,

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

Paul first refers to this. I believe if we are to understand verse 12, we need to define this. What is he referring to that he has not obtained? Because we have memorized these verses, we can easily check that out. Go back and start at verse 7 and begin to say your verses out loud. (and yes, I mean "your verses" because as you memorize them, hopefully you are taking ownership of them) As you say them, consider what Paul is referring to as he says, "***not that I have already obtained all this...***" As I consider verses 7-11, I believe he is referring to:

- Considering everything a loss compared to knowing Christ
- Gaining Christ
- Being found in Christ, totally trusting Him for our righteousness through faith
- Knowing Christ
- Knowing the power of Christ's resurrection
- Sharing in Christ's sufferings
- Attaining to the resurrection from the dead

That is a pretty incredible list and I can totally relate to Paul here; I haven't obtained it all either. These things are my goal, but I haven't obtained them all yet. I do see glimpses of them in my life, I have areas where I have lots of victory but I can say along with Paul, "I haven't been made perfect yet." And I am sure I could find many friends and family to agree with me!

That takes us to our next very important word here. It is the word but. You see, no, I haven't obtained all this yet and no I haven't been made perfect yet, **BUT!** This little word moves us forward! This little word brings hope! This little word keeps us going in this life of faith! It is this little word that connects who I am with what I hope to be. It states the way things are, but it opens the door for the way things can be in Christ. That little word, but is a very important word of hope here.

Years ago God ministered hope to me. I struggled for quite some time with depression and I know that many of you have been there too. You know what it is like to live in the land of "I wish" and to be under the covering of despair, believing that your wish will always be just out of your reach, not available to someone like you. God has so much more for us. God has taught me to live with a conviction of hope in Him, a conviction that reaches to me even when I am fully aware that I have not obtained all that I need to yet in my life in Christ. When I have hope in Him, I have learned that I can't despair; there is hope for me in Christ in all things.

What does that have to do with this little word **but**? It has a lot to do with it. You see, we can look at our life in Christ and realize that we haven't obtained it all yet. That can bring frustration, a sense of guilt, a believing that we will never get it all together enough to be a "good Christian" (no such thing anyway ☺). However we can easily fall into that kind of thinking.

This little word **but** is the hope connector between where we are still lacking and then what we can hope for and press on for in Christ. This little word **but** is really a representation of faith! It represents taking a good hard look at ourselves, realizing we still have a long way to go and then making the decision that we aren't giving up, we are going to press on!

That moves us on to the last vocabulary word, the word **that**. Paul says,

*"I press on to take hold of **that** for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."*

Can you define "that"? Why did Jesus die for you? Why did Jesus go to such great lengths to reach down in your pit of sin and take hold of you? Do you deeply desire to take hold of the reason He did that in your life? In order to do so, we have to be able to define **that**.

I used to teach Bible in a Christian school and in our Basic Christian Beliefs class we spent a lot of time talking about the benefits that we receive because Jesus died for us. We know that Jesus died to forgive us of our sins, but do you know that there are many other benefits bequeathed to you through His reaching out to take hold of you? They are all combined in this verse here in the word **that**. Benefits such as:

- Being able to enter into God's presence to talk to Him (Hebrews 10:19-22)
- Being able to do all things through Christ's strength (Philippians 4:13)
- Being adopted into the family of God (Galatians 4:5)
- Being clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27)
- Being guarded by Christ's peace (Philippians 4:7)
- Being assured that we will not lack wisdom (James 1:5)
- Being refined (1 Peter 1:6-7)

This is just a sampling of the list. We need to make sure we understand, when Jesus took hold of us, He had great reason. If I was to define **that** in verse 12, I would have to say **that** is a compilation of what Jesus meant when He said He came to give "abundant life". In John 10:10 it tells us that Jesus came to bring us abundant life. Jesus took hold of me and He took hold of you to give us abundant life!

If I am honest, I have to say I don't believe I have obtained the fullness of this abundant life yet and I am pretty certain you probably haven't either. But...I have known moments of it, I have lived in seasons of it and it awesome! I am fully convinced that Christ didn't die for me so I could visit the abundant life every now and then, so I could go on vacation with it once a year. He took hold of me to give it to me so I could live in abundant life on a daily basis! So... my faith compels me to press on to take hold of **that**, to take hold of this abundant life in a greater way than I do right now. I want to know this abundant life that Jesus died to give me and in Christ, I know I can...

All that said, I also know, there are so many wonders of knowing Christ and because of that, I believe while we are on this earth, we may always look at our lives and say, "Boy, this abundance in Christ is so rich, I love what I have now, but I am still certain there is more!" The Bible speaks of the depth of His love, the mystery of His riches... Verse 12 challenges us press on to take hold of it. Keep pressing!

Pressing on with you,

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