



Conducted by
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“Would you please explain the meaning of the words ‘apprehended’ and ‘attain’, as used by the Apostle Paul in the context of Philippians 3:11 onwards.”

This is a question which illustrates quite well the wisdom and precision of the Holy Spirit in indicating through Paul the progression of the Christian experience, and also the perception of fundamental truths. Too often we are all guilty of too cursory an examination of the text with the result that the initial interpretation which invades the mind, and which is usually based rightly or wrongly on past understanding, is the interpretation which we accept without further investigation. In this way error, or a less enlightened understanding, is compounded. It is sad to relate that this very point was a source of great disappointment to the Lord Himself in His dealings with the people of the nation into which He was born and who should have understood better, and His own disciples who seemed not to have understood the nature of His mission until after His resurrection. However, we are indebted to the Apostle, especially in his Philippian letter, for revealing to us how *he* felt about his Lord, and this we shall study in some greater depth.

To Apprehend

The verb ‘to apprehend’ means ‘to lay hold of; the further idea is ‘to lay hold so as to possess as one’s own’; ‘to appropriate’. The Greek word used is KATALAMBANO. It is this idea of laying hold of ‘to possess as one’s own’ which seems to dominate the mind of Paul. He says, in the latter part of verse 12 “but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” Paul would never forget how the Lord had appropriated him on the Damascus road; how he had heard the voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” How he asked for identification and was told, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest”; and how his response had been complete and immediate, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do”? He knew that the Lord had laid hold on him and possessed him for Himself, and when he was told to go into the city he went, and did there precisely as instructed. Furthermore, we know from the text in Acts 9 that when Ananias advanced valid reasons against the choice of the Lord he was told peremptorily, “Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel (v15). Paul wanted with all his heart to possess Christ *as his own*, in the same way that Christ possessed him. As a student of the O.T. scriptures he would no doubt recall how Israel had covenanted with God, “And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the Lord gave the rest round about” (2 Chron. 15:12-15).

I think that we can now see a little more clearly what Paul meant when he said, “If that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” His whole spiritual desire was to possess the Lord as completely as the

Lord had possessed him. This is why I personally like the word 'appropriate'. It doesn't really matter how clever we are with words, how we think we understand the Bible, how good our sermons are, or how well loved we think we are among the brethren; unless we have appropriated the Lord as Paul wanted to appropriate Him, then the rest is of little value. Sometimes people misunderstand when we say that once Christ is personally appropriated in the sense in which Paul desired, then it doesn't really matter how many of the brethren defect; the possession of Christ would be all in all to those who possessed Him. One of the saddest commentaries, and one of the most astounding, on the appropriation of Christ is found in Romans 9:30-34 where Paul there says, "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained (KATALAMABANO, appropriated) to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained (appropriated) to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith..."). Oh, how many Christians have pierced themselves through with many sorrows because they have appropriated *their own desires*, rather than the treasure of Heaven, the Risen Christ.

The words of Paul in Phil 3:13 are interesting. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended". He hadn't yet reached the summit of his great spiritual desire (perhaps like many of us). "But one thing (I do), forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus". I have placed 'I do' in brackets because there is no verb in the Greek, but that doesn't really matter because the single-minded concentration of Paul is urging him to reach forward all the time and with all his energy to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Everything in the past has been banished from his mind. His spiritual desire is for that place in Heaven so that he can ever be with his Lord. Would that every time we quote Paul we should remember his great spiritual desire, and appropriate Jesus to ourselves, i.e., to ever be possessed of the Lord, and ever long to be where He is.

To Attain

The original word KATANTAO signifies to reach, to arrive at. So what Paul is saying in Phil. 3:11-12 is "If by any means I might attain (reach, arrive at) the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect". At this point we need to exercise a little care in the interpretation. The context illustrates quite vividly the overriding passion of Paul; he wanted to know *all* about Jesus; to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His suffering, conformity to His death, everything. From among all these paramount aims he says, "if by any means I might attain (reach) unto the resurrection of (from among) the dead". Paul here is not referring to the *general* resurrection nor is he denying it, but he *is* testifying to the fact that the power of the Gospel has brought him out from among the dead (in sin) and that now he is striving in his present life for complete identification with Christ in *His* Resurrection. In verse 12, the word 'attained' has not the same meaning as in v11. The original word in v12 is LAMBANO which means 'obtained'. So the first part of v12 would read, "Not as though I had already attained (obtained), either were already perfect." Paul was humble enough to know that all of his previous experiences, even being taken hold of by Christ on the Damascus road, had not suddenly made him absolutely Christlike. He knew that the goal was still before him, not behind him; he also knew quite well that to achieve Christlikeness he had to work at his salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12-13). What a Church there would be here on earth if all of the saints were

striving toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, and in so doing ultimately reaching through the new life complete identification with the Risen Christ. I am sure that this is how both Christ and Paul envisaged the Church for which Christ died.

There is just one further verse to consider in the context. We read in v16, "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing". Bagster's Englishman's Greek New Testament gives 'rule' as KANONI which denotes a straight rod as used for measuring; a measuring instrument. The metaphorical use of the word is illustrated both in Phil. 3:16, and Galatians 6:16. In the Galatian passage the word is governed by what is said in vv14,15, which read, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, etc". So what Paul is saying in Phil. 3:16 can be paraphrased like this, 'look, we have reached a certain stage in our Christian lives. having come so far, let us go on *in the same path*'. This is a much-needed lesson for us all, especially the innovators. Sometimes Christians tend to grow weary at the so-called monotony and routine of the Christian life, but Paul says to us all, 'press on; respond to the upward call; work; endure; make your calling and election sure; above all, keep on the same road you have travelled on up to now.'