



World Christian Fellowship

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Philippians 33 Run for the Prize

Philippians 3:12-16, *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. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

Apostle Paul uses the analogy of Athletics in his epistles to bring out the spiritual truth.

Here athletic analogy is that of a runner, running a race. The runner to him is the picture of the Christian, and the race is the Christian life.

V14 is the central theme in this passage.

The theme here then is pursuing the prize.

The analogy is that of a runner who is running to win in order that he might gain the prize. The spiritual point here is the matter of pursuing the spiritual prize.

Paul is talking about Christian effort toward growth.

Chapter **3:4-11**, he has just given his personal testimony of the experience of his own conversion.

Paul gave his credential as profit column in verses 5 and 6.

V7 what he thought was gain has been turn into loss column.

V8-11 Paul described what he had gained when he received Christ into his life.

1. Self-dissatisfaction

2. Press on

3. Focus

Any athlete knows that when you are running in a race you must fix your eyes on something ahead of you.

You cannot watch your feet, or you will fall on your face.

You cannot watch the people around you or you will trip, or somebody will pass you on the other side.

Your focus is straight forward on the goal that is ahead.

When you are making a maximum effort there is a concentration point upon which you focus.

V 13, 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,

"Brethren," and by the way, that's a term of affection.

In an expression of warmth Paul address them.

That's a third time Paul said that.

Why is he so repetitive?

It carries an argument directed at people who are teaching error, so he wants to make his point abundantly clear because a lot is at stake in this particular polemic.

I don't care whether those Judaizers claim to have it or not, it's not possible.

It leads us to believe that the Judaizers were claiming they had reached perfection through law keeping and circumcision. But Paul is saying that I do not think, I do not believe that I have laid hold of it yet.

V 13, *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,*

The man had an unbelievable level of concentration.

This is necessary for being a great athlete.

Those who totally focused people in athletics succeed.

The world is full of people who are clever at much and successful at nothing because they never can focus their life.

They are like the guy who jumped on his horse and rode off madly in all directions, a lot of energy and a lot of fury and a lot of action, no progress.

They are not focused.

That's why the Psalmist prayed.

Psalms 86:11, *Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.*

James warned about a double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways and he's blown all over the place.

Here was a man with a focused concentration. The focus of his life was one thing.

What was it?

It was pursuing the prize!

14, *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

That is the one thing in my life.

That's what makes a great man.

Just do one thing right in your life and you will be way ahead of most people.

Don't criticize that one-dimensional person who is eminently successful at what they do. In the spiritual dimension it is equally true. When your life has one driving compulsion and that is to be like Christ, you are moving in the right direction.

As you pursue the truth of God, you narrow to one thing. Purity of heart is to will one thing.

Focused concentration is the result of a negative and a positive.

Negative:

V 13, *"Forgetting what lies behind,"*
that's the negative. And then he says,

Positive:

V 13, *"And reaching forward to what lies ahead,"*

You eliminate the past.
Don't look back!

Don't look back. It is irrelevant. Nothing happening back there is relevant.

Negative:

Have you heard runners' interview?

When the interviewers ask, "**Did you feel the pressure of the persons coming up?**"

"No, I run my own race. It is not relevant to me what is going on around me, it is only relevant that I make the maximum effort. I worry only about my own effort."

Don't look back.
Make a break with the past.
This is such good advice.

What about Perfectionists?

They are always looking at the past, reminding everybody of their past achievements.

Legalists always looking at the past, it's the basis on which they have their present spiritual status.

The Judaizers in Galatia wanted to dig up the past and push it off on the Galatian church.

Galatians 5:1-2, *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*² *Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.*

What does Paul mean by the past?

Everything.

Good things and bad things.

- Achievements,
- virtuous deeds,
- great accomplishments,
- spiritual ministries,
- sins,
- iniquities,
- failures,
- disasters and
- Etc.
- All of it!

Forget it all?

Yes!

Why?

It does not belong to you.

Romans 8:38-39, *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,*³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

1 Corinthians 3:21-23, *Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. ²³ And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*

Because it has nothing to do with the future.

Did you understand that? It has nothing to do with what you're doing right now, absolutely nothing to do with it.

You cannot live on past victories.

You cannot celebrate your value by your past.

You should never be debilitated by your past sins, iniquities, and burdens of guilt.

Psalms 103:12, *As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

Yet most people are so much distracted by the past that they never get around to running the future.

Let me illustrate with an example:

Sarah:

Hebrews 11:11, *By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.*

Actually, what took place?

Genesis 18:12, *Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"*

But then when God asked her why you laughed and then she lied.

Genesis 18:15, *But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"*

Past achievements also need to be forgotten!

- I committed my life and I served the Lord.
- I used to be the worship leader.
- I used to be an elder in our church.
- I used to be the home group leader.
- I used to be the assistant pastor.
- I used to be the senior Pastor.

Forget it all!

The clearest vision is given to the one who forgets the past.

People still talk about some good old days of their,

- School,
- College,
- Home,
- Parents Home,
- Church,
- Etc

Remember the Israelites were not able to forget the Egypt and its food!

Today is a new day!
This is another race.

We are not interested in what had gone past.
It doesn't matter because if you don't look good today, you are not going to win. That's all matters.

Forget the past.

Nobody's interested in all that stuff out of your past.
Nobody's interested in what you did in the past!

What God is interested in is what are we going to do now and where we going in the future?

Churches are full of people who are holding all kinds of grudges, bitterness's, perspectives, and junk from the past and they are paralyzed by it.

The recollection of what you were in your former unconverted state shouldn't paralyze you and it shouldn't discourage you. Disappointments and temptations of the past must not depress you.

Put your hand to the plow, don't look back and move, pursue the prize.

Positive:

V 13, 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,

This is a runner stretching every muscle to reach what is in front of him, the prize. Focused concentration, nothing with the past, just looking at the goal, moving as fast as possible.

Do you have that kind of focused concentration?

What are you focused on?

Even as a minister of Jesus Christ, my goal in life is

- not to build a big church,
- not to succeed in the church,
- not to develop programs,
- not to make this ministry is so big, etc

But my focused goal in life must be to be like Jesus Christ!

In the pursuit of being like Jesus Christ, out of that's going to flow an impactful life.

That's the one thing Apostle Paul did, and I do as well, and I earnestly request every one of you to do!

Perfection in Christ, the only goal, the only legitimate perspective.

Colossians 1:28-29, *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. ²⁹To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.*

Ephesians 4:13, *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*

Galatians 4:19, *My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you,*

Colossians 4:12, *Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*

So, what does it take to effectively pursue the prize and grow spiritually?

4. Spiritual motivation.

V 14, *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Continuously bear down on the goal.

What's the goal?

Become like Christ.

The same thing He saved you for is what you pursue.

Why do you do that?

"For the prize."

You do it for the prize.

Run to win.

What's the goal?

What did we say the goal was? To be what?

Like Christ.

What's the prize?

To be made like Christ.

What's going to happen when that upward call comes?

You are going to be like Christ.

- ✓ The goal is the prize!
- ✓ The prize is the goal!

Someday I will be like Christ, that is the prize that God gives to the one who runs the race.

- ✓ The goal is to be like Christ, perfection in Christ.
- ✓ The prize is to be like Christ, perfection in Christ.

Someday we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He is!

1 John 3:2, *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*

What motivates us?

The upward call.

We must live in the light of the Rapture!

We must live in the light of being called out of this world into presence of God and at that point we will be given glory, we will be given an eternal reward, we will be made like Christ.

If God is so gracious to be willing to give us that prize, how committed should we be to run the race?

We, wretched, wicked, vile, godless sinners on our way to hell. God in sovereign grace picks us out, chooses us for salvation in order that He might eternally make us like His own Son.

What a wonderful grace!

That is the prize that motivates every Christian to run toward the goal.

Paul saw it at the end of his life when he wrote his last letter.

2 Timothy 4:7-8, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

What is the crown of righteousness?

Perfection.

Paul was waiting for perfection which God's going to give him the day he sees Him.

Conclusion:

In pursuing the prize, we must recognize divine resources to pursue that better condition.

V 15, 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.

Why would Paul throw that word perfect in there?

It's sarcastic.

This is against the Judaizers, he is dealing with the fact that the Judaizers were talking that they were perfect.

So there's a sarcasm in there that bites a little bit at the claims of the Judaizers.

Paul feels that and every pastor would have that attitude.

If you are a true Christian,

- ✓ your desire would be to pursue the prize,
- ✓ you would make maximum effort,
- ✓ you have focused concentration,
- ✓ you be motivated by the great prize and
- ✓ you would pursue with all your might that prize.

Paul says that you will have this attitude.

The church is full of people who aren't interested in pursuing the prize.

They are interested in looking at the past.

They are content with where they are.

They want to spend the rest of their life justifying the level of their attainment and convincing everybody around them that they are very spiritual.

Instead of recognizing their need, instead of making a maximum effort with focused concentration and motivation, they just are content with where they are, and they want to spend their life justifying where they are.

Paul is going to talk about those who have different attitude in verses 17 to 21.

"Then God will reveal that also to you."

Paul simply says I must leave you to God.

If you are ever going to get the message and you won't get it from me, then you will have to get it from God.

Every pastor does that!

Pour out from their heart what the Lord had bestowed upon them and then leave it to God to do the rest.

Paul says that you will have to recognize that in this pursuing the prize you are dependent on divine resources.

V 16, *Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.*

Spiritually stay in line and keep moving from where you have arrived by the same standard or principle that got you where you are.

Stay in line, stay in step, be consistent, keep moving. Wherever you are spiritually by the same principles that got you there, keep moving ahead.

Consistency, conformity, live up to the level of your present understanding and by the principles that brought you there, keep moving ahead, stay in line, hold the principle tightly and move down the track.

Stay in your lane and move as fast as you can from where you are. Whatever strength and energy got you where you are, use it to move ahead.

If we were talking about the runner metaphor, we would say you have run this far in your lane with great effort, it's gotten

you so far, keep that same effort up in that same lane until you hit the finish.

What are the ingredients that help us do that?

a) Word of God

1 Peter 2:2-3, *as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

As new-born babes desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow, constantly in the Word, constantly in the Word will keep you consistent, it will keep you on track. It will keep you moving, it will keep you pursuing the prize.

b) Prayer

1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, *For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?*

We are praying that your faith will be complete.
Stay in the Word be in prayer.

c) Follow an Example

V 17, *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

Find somebody to pattern your life after. Get a spiritual mentor who can help you pursue the prize consistently.

It takes the Word, it takes prayer, it takes a model to follow.

d) Trials

1 Peter 5:10, *"After you have suffered a while, the Lord make you perfect."*

James 1:2-5, *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

Why do you do it, Paul?

To gain the prize.

How hard do you do it?

With maximum effort.

How focused are you, Paul?

I concentrate on nothing else.

How dependent on God are you?

When I fail, I trust that He will reveal to me my failure and move me out.

What's the secret, Paul?

Consistent time in the Word, consistent time in prayer, consistently following an example and God bringing the enough trials to shape my life.

Are you pursuing the prize?

Are you growing?

A lot of people have died climbing Himalayas, falling off precipices. At the foot of one of the many mountains that has been attempted several times is a little grave, it's the grave of a man who tried to climb to the pinnacle and fell off a precipice to his death.

The tombstone there is very simple. It gives his name and then it says, "He died climbing."

That really should be the epitaph of the tomb of every Christian, "He died climbing."