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Philippians 33 Holy Discontentment

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.

Paul received Christ and in Christ he had gained all of this might lead someone to assume that Paul had reached spiritual perfection.

Some might even think that having come to Christ he was instantaneously made perfect.

There is nothing left to become, or more to seek, or to pursue.

Also, possible that the Judaizers, who were pursuing the Philippian church, were telling the Philippians that spiritual

perfection was available if they would be circumcised and keep the law.

There were heretics around at that time who believed you could reach a certain level of knowledge in which you attained perfection.

There were Gnostics who thought that they had reached perfection.

So, counter all of them Paul launches quickly to tell them that there is no spiritual perfection.

Paul wants us to know that he is not perfect.

Paul has not reached moral perfection.

- ✓ Paul has not reached spiritual perfection even though he is a new creation.
- ✓ Paul has not reached perfection even though he has a new heart.
- ✓ Paul has not reached perfection even when a new nature which desires strongly holy things.
- ✓ Paul has not reached perfection even though he had union with Jesus Christ and a new mind, the mind of Christ.
- ✓ Paul has not reached perfection even though he has new standing before God.

- ✓ Paul has not reached perfection even though he is accepted by God and entitled to heaven.
- ✓ Paul has not reached perfection even though he has the indwelling Holy Spirit who is the power of God.
- ✓ Paul has not reached perfection even though he has promised future glory.

In spite of all these things he is not perfect!
Paul has not arrived at the perfection.

Paul is still the possessor of his unredeemed flesh.
He is still a sinner.

Any thought of perfection must be set aside in favour of pursuing the perfection!
Every believer must recognize he is not perfect.

Paul, had already been

- placed in Christ,
- accepted by God,
- gifted with all these tremendous things, and
- yet he was not perfect.

Paul had not arrived.

Peter understood it very well.

2 Peter 3:18, *"Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

Peter was saying the same thing Paul is saying here.
There is a growing process.

When you are saved,

- you receive the knowledge of Christ,
- you receive the righteousness of Christ positionally imputed to your account,
- you receive the power of Christ in your life,
- you receive the fellowship of Christ in communion with Him,
- you receive the glory of Christ but not in perfection.

So, there must be growth.

There must be the pursuit of the goal.

In other words there must be the running of the race.

The pressing toward the mark.

Someone might turn around and say now that I have become a Christian and I know I am going to be in heaven then why should I bother about growing in the Lord and pursue such a perfection?

- 1. If you are a new creation in Jesus Christ, you will desire to grow.**

Having been born into the family of God you are born with a hunger, almost insatiable hunger.

There is a built-in desire, drive and longing for growth.

2. To glorify God.

A Christian is supposed to do with his life is bring glory to God.

3. It confirms your born again.

It is demonstrable the fact that you are truly changed because you are in the progress of making it visible that your life is being changed.

4. Wear the Truth

You wear the truth of God so others can see it.

5. Assurance

It grants you assurance. When there is spiritual progress in your life that you belong to God because you can see His work and your calling and election become sure.

6. Preserves you

It preserves you from the sorrows and the tragedies of spiritual weakness which are not enjoyable to any believer any time.

7. Confirms the Character of Christ

The cause of Christ from reproach because when you live a godly life and you pursue the goal, your life is consistent with the character of Christ. The character Christ upholds in Scripture and thus you are not a reproach to Him.

8. Produces the Joy in your life.

When you pursue the prize and run the race and grow spiritually it produces joy and usefulness in your life.

9. Competent in the Church

When you have the joy, you can minister competently to the church.

10. Effective witness

Certainly, it enhances your witness to the lost world.

So, Paul like a runner in a race is doing just that.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.²⁵ And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.²⁶ Therefore I run thus: not with*

uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Paul says that,

- I do everything I can not to be disqualified, to run the race with maximum effort and maximum conformity to the rules.
- I don't run half-heartedly.
- I run all out.
- I don't violate the rules.
- I don't take spiritual steroids, whatever you want to say, I stay within the rules.
- I compete as I am supposed to.

But I run the race.

The Apostle Paul is trying to show the readers in Philippi that because he is a Christian does not mean he has attained perfection. But beyond that he is trying to teach all of us and all generations that perfection in this life is a goal, not an achievement.

It is something you pursue but never reach. This attacks effectively the false doctrine of perfectionism.

Methodist, Wesleyan, and Nazarene teach perfectionism, or as it was called total sanctification, or complete sanctification.

That is that a believer in this life on this earth before death can reach a place of spiritual moral perfection. They teach that.

They do not teach that that is a result of progress, they teach that as a result of a momentary instantaneous second work of grace, like salvation, you are momentarily instantaneously made sinless.

In fact, some have gone so far as to say it encompasses the eradication of the sin nature.

The Apostle Paul deals a devastating blow to this doctrine of perfectionism.

So, Paul, deals a death blow to that particular perfectionist's theory, he denies it and he calls for a pursuit of a prize that can only be fully realized in heaven.

In this passage he confesses after 30 years becoming a Christian that,

- he hadn't reached it,
- he hadn't attained it,
- he hadn't acquired it, and
- he hadn't arrived at perfection.

Apostle Paul, perhaps the most committed dedicated Christian who ever lived, after 30 years had not achieved perfection, who in the world are any of us to claim such?

V 12, 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.

Paul is saying I have knowledge in Christ, the righteousness, power, fellowship, glory of Christ, I have all the great benedictions that God can give in Christ, but I have not attained moral spiritual perfection in my own life.

Paul then goes on in verses 13-16 to talk about how we must pursue that.

Now, the basic thrust of the passage then is a call to pursue the prize. It's a call to pursue the goal, the prize which is spiritual perfection.

We are to give our whole life to this, that's what he's saying in verse 14. "I press toward that." The word "press" meaning I pursue, I chase it, I run after it.

1. Self-dissatisfaction

Self-dissatisfaction brings an awareness of the need to pursue a better condition not better position.

Because your position in Christ is fixed by God's grace through Christ. But your condition must be improved.

You are not what you should be, you are not what you can be, you are not what you will be some day when you see the Lord.

So, there must be an awareness of the need to pursue a better condition. Perfectionists don't do this.

Anyone who thinks that they have reached spiritual perfection has no awareness of pursuing a better condition.

What the people in perfectionism do?

They get to the point where they think they have arrived at the level of spiritual perfection therefore there is nothing left to pursue.

They become content with their condition, and worse than that, they spend the rest of their life instead of pursuing a better condition, defending themselves as perfect to people who aren't convinced.

V 12. *"Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect."*

Paul the Apostle, 30 years after his conversion is saying that I am not what I ought to be.

I am sure we all can echo the same things in our own life.

I can stand here and echo that testimony after all the years of walking with the Lord and all the years of ministry, I am not what I ought to be. I haven't arrived. I am not spiritually perfect.

I am not morally perfect. I haven't reached Christ's likeness. I have not reached God's perfect standard. I am not what I ought to be, I am still in process. There is still a pursuit in my life as there is in the life of every believer.

Whatever we achieve spiritually begins with dissatisfaction.
I am not pleased with where I am in my spiritual life.
I am not content with my spiritual condition.

If you are content, you have reached a very dangerous point. It is a point at which you will find yourself insensitive to sin and defending yourself when you ought to be admitting your weakness and pursuing spiritual strength.

So spiritual growth, this whole pursuing starts with a recognition that you are not where you ought to be.

A runner standing at the beginning of the race saying that I got to get to the end of this race. I am not there! I have got to run this course.

Paul knew what he had in Christ and he also knew that he wasn't perfect.

When he said what he had got in Christ instantly he says that I have arrived at the perfection.

Paul had the knowledge of Christ.

1 Corinthians 13:12, *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

Paul had the complete righteousness of Christ.

2 Corinthians 7:1, *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

Paul includes himself with the sinful Corinthians as one who needs to perfect his flesh.

Paul had righteousness, but not perfect practical outworking of that.

Paul had the perfect power of Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:7, *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.*

Paul had the fellowship of Christ.

Romans 8:26-27, *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

Paul had the glory of Christ.

Philippians 3:20-21, *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*

So, Paul says that, I have all these things but not in perfection in my own life. I must grow. I must pursue the prize.

Everything starts from here knowing that you have not arrived. You have not attained it!

If you have got to the place where you feel satisfied, that's a very dangerous place to be in.

If you have had

- enough prayer,
- enough church,
- enough teaching of the Word of God
- enough of the Bible and
- enough of Christian fellowship to satisfy you,

You are in a very dangerous condition.

Don't lose your self-dissatisfaction ever!

Awareness of the need to pursue a better condition is where all spiritual progress starts.

Holy discontent,
Holy dissatisfaction,
Are the tool to recognise that you are not what you ought to be.

2. Press on

You must press on!

There must be maximum effort to pursue to get over the self-dissatisfaction about your condition.

V 12, *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.*

The word can be translated as,

- I press on,
- I run,
- I follow after,
- I pursue,
- I chase.

It is used of a sprinter and the word means aggressive energetic endeavour.

Paul says that I am running after this thing with all my might.

This is the straining of every spiritual muscle, this is running to win.

1 Corinthians 9:24, *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.*

This is pursuing the prize with all your might.

This is fighting the good fight.

1 Timothy 6:12, *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

2 Timothy 4:7, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

This is running the race to win.

Hebrews 12:1-2, *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Paul is saying that I run, I pursue, I chase, I haven't arrived, maximum effort.

It takes maximum effort using the means of grace provided to you by God to pursue spiritual perfection.

What's he after?

V 12, *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.*

Paul wants to get a hold of something. The verb means to seize or grasp.

What are you running after, Paul?

I am after that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

I am pursuing the prize so that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

What do you mean by that, Paul?

I am pursuing the very thing that was the reason Christ pursued me.

Paul is saying that “my goal in life is consistent with Christ's goal for my salvation”.

Christ saved me for a purpose that purpose of His in saving me has become my purpose in my spiritual progress.

The reason Christ redeemed me has become the goal of my life. My will is now His will, I want for me what He wanted for me and saved me to accomplish.

What is it?

Romans 8:28-29, *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Why were you saved?

Why did God choose you and then save you?

In order to make you like what?

His Son.

What's the goal of your Christian life then?

It's the same thing for which you were saved, He saved you to make you like His Son and that purpose for which He saves you becomes the purpose for which you live.

We are all in a life-long pursuit of Christ's likeness.

You may think that you have arrived at some point of spiritual perfection, but I think if you put yourself against Christ you are going to be a little more realistic.

Christ's likeness is the goal.

We were redeemed that we might be made like His Son.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, *But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We have been saved in order to gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, Paul says, "I make a maximum effort. I am pursuing with all my might that very thing for which Christ pursued me."

Why did Christ pursue Paul, slam him into the dirt on the Damascus Road and redeem him?

In order to make him like Christ.

Goal of Christ has become my goal.

Is that a worthy goal?

Does it require a life's commitment?

Of course!

So, Paul says I run, I run to win, I run with all my might, I pursue hard after this goal for which I was saved.