**Philippians Chapter 3:12-16**

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**The “Pressing On” of the Christian Believer, 3:1–21**

**B.** **Pressing On: Paul’s Personal Testimony—Rejecting Self-Righteousness and Seeking Perfection, 3:4–16**

**Introduction**: all across the world men sense they need a relationship with God. They have a sense of God, but they sense there is something wrong between them and God. Sometimes they feel things are right; other times as though things are wrong. But underlying whatever feelings they have, men are never sure whether or not things are right with God. They lack perfect assurance and confidence that they please God enough to be acceptable to Him. They have a hope that God will accept them, but they do not know, not with absolute certainty.

It is these feelings that have stirred the religions of the world. Men want to be right with God; they want to be approved and accepted by God. They want God to look after them and help them, and they want God to accept them when this life is over. Therefore, they set out to do what they feel will make them *good enough* to be acceptable to God. They try to do whatever good they feel is necessary to please *their god*. Granted, the degree to which men feel this differs among all men. One man will feel that he has to be extremely good, whereas another man feels that he has to be moderately good. The point to note is this: *this kind of religion* is a religion …

• of works

• of doing good

• of securing God’s favor

• of making oneself acceptable to God

• of being good

• of preparing oneself for God

• of making oneself approved by God

It is a religion of self-righteousness—of becoming as righteous and good as a person can—of earning and meriting God’s favor—of working one’s way into God’s presence. There is, of course, a severe fallacy with this approach to God.

⇒ God is perfect and not a single person is perfect. No person can do enough good to become perfect no matter what he does. In fact, man is already imperfect; and once perfection is lost, it is lost. Imperfection can never become perfection, not by the efforts of human (imperfect) flesh. Imperfection cannot make perfection.

The point is this: no person can ever earn or merit the right to live in God’s presence. If a person is ever going to live in God’s presence, it will be because God loves the person enough to accept him and to transform him into a perfect person. This is exactly what God does through Jesus Christ. God accepts men *through His Son*, through the love and grace of His Son.

It was this, the gospel of Jesus Christ, that Paul had missed. And it is this that so many in the world miss. Paul had never seen the great love of God for man. Yet, *above all men*, he had given his life to seeking after God, doing all the good he could to make himself acceptable to God. But despite all his achievements, he still did not have peace with God. Perfect assurance and confidence—of living eternally with God—was still lacking. This is the message of the present passage: Paul’s personal testimony—his rejection of self-righteousness and turning to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

1. Paul had achieved the height in self-righteousness (vv. 4–6).

2. Paul sought to win Christ—His righteousness, His perfection (vv. 7–11).

3. Paul did not count himself as having yet arrived—he was not yet perfect (vv. 12–16).

**3** (3:12–16) **Righteousness—Perfection—Paul**: Paul did not count himself as having yet attained—he was not yet perfect. Perfection is the great end of the believer. God has apprehended or laid hold of the believer for one reason only: to perfect the believer—to make him perfect so that he can live and worship and serve Christ forever.

Now note a critical point: no person achieves perfection on this earth. The fact is so evident to the thinking and honest man that it is actually ridiculous to even make the statement. Yet, too many are so narrow in their thinking that they seldom if ever grasp what perfection would really mean. For example …

• Consider the brain and the mind. It has been estimated that man uses only *one-tenth of one percent* of his mental capacity. Imagine how far short this is of perfection!

• Consider the body. What would a perfect body be like? A body that never desired, thought, or did wrong; that never came up short; that never aged, deteriorated, died or decayed?

The examples could go on and on, but note what Paul says: he had not attained perfection. In fact, he was always emphasizing how far short he came.

**“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Ro. 7:18–19).**

**“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God” (2 Co. 3:5).**

**“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ep. 3:8).**

Beyond doubt, Paul was one of the greatest men who has ever lived. The great *Book of Second Corinthians* clearly shows this. If Paul was so short of perfection, how much further are we? The point bears repeating: no person achieves perfection on this earth. But note: Paul says five significant things.

a. Paul followed after perfection, after his God-given purpose. When Christ saved Paul, that was just the beginning, not the end. He had been saved to *live for Christ and to serve Christ*, and as long as he was on this earth he was going to *live for Christ* and do all he could *to serve Christ*. The word “follow after” (dioko) means to press; to pursue just like a runner in a race. There was no place for walking, much less for sitting or lying around in comfort, complacency and lethargy. Christ had saved Paul for perfection—to attain to the resurrection of the dead—and as long as Paul was on this earth, he was going to press and run after perfection.

⇒ Paul was going to do all he could to help the Lord in the Lord’s great task of perfecting him.

⇒ Paul was going to do all he could to lay hold of perfection—the perfection for which the Lord had laid hold of him.

**Thought 1.** There is no such thing as a genuine believer sitting still after he has been saved. The believer must not …

• become comfortable, complacent, lethargic, or lazy

• waste time and lose opportunity

• begin to think he is safe and secure forever; therefore, he can sometimes do what he likes and give in to his own desires

The believer must follow, run, and press after perfection—the perfection for which Christ has saved him. The believer must be active in living for Christ.

**“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Co. 9:24–27).**

**“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair” (2 Co. 4:7–8).**

**“Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Ga. 5:7).**

**“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (He. 12:1).**

b. Paul worked at forgetting the past. This is a verse that is of enormous help to believers who have failed God—miserably failed Him. Paul had so failed God, and he was always confessing how far short he came (see Ro. 7:18–19; 2 Co. 3:5; Ep. 3:8). Paul faced what so many of us face:

⇒ failure and shortcoming

⇒ the struggle to forget it and to move on

How does a person do this? It is one of the most difficult things in all the world to do. And it is especially difficult if others are not forgiving and willing to let the believer put his failure behind him. But note: Paul tells us how to deal with the past. How? By concentrating and controlling the mind and by reaching forth to those things which are before us. Note the concentration and focus:

⇒ but *one thing*.

⇒ but *this one thing I do*.

In one focused act, we must forget the things that are past and reach forth to those things that are before us. The act involves two parts: both forgetting and reaching forth. The past cannot be forgotten without reaching forth to what lies ahead. A person cannot sit around moaning and regretting the past. To do so is to be concentrating upon the past. The things of the past are to be *forgotten*. The things of the future are to be the focus of the mind. The believer is to zero in on the things at hand and on the things that lie ahead. If we do this, there is no time to wallow around in the past and its failure.

**“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Lu. 13:24).**

**“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Co. 15:58).**

**“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Ga. 6:9).**

**“Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Col. 1:29).**

**“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (He. 12:4).**

**“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 1:13).**

**“Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Re. 3:11).**

c. Paul pressed on toward the goal, toward God’s purpose in Christ Jesus. What is God’s purpose for us in Christ Jesus? It is to be conformed to the image of Christ—to be perfect even as He is perfect. Once we are perfect …

• we shall be incorruptible and eternal

• we shall live in honor and glory

• we shall live in God’s perfect presence and power

• we shall live in perfect righteousness and purity

• we shall live worshipping and serving God eternally

Perfection means eternal life, a perfect life that never ends—that goes on and on doing the things that God created us to do. Perfection means the eternal life of Jesus Christ—being conformed to the perfection of Jesus Christ. (See notes—Ro. 8:29; 1 Co. 15:42–44 for more discussion.)

**“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Ro. 8:16–17).**

**“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Ro. 8:29).**

**“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Ph. 3:21).**

**“Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:24).**

**“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2).**

d. Paul kept his mind on growing and maturing in Christ. All believers are ordained by God to be perfect in Christ Jesus, and we shall be perfected in the glorious day of redemption. Let us, therefore, as many as are ordained by God to be perfected, keep our minds on perfection.

Note: this is sometimes difficult to do because we live in a world that is gripped by the lust for …

• comfort and ease

• pleasure and plenty

• possessions and recognition

• indulgence and extravagance

• more and more

But note something: God will not let the genuine believer rest unless his mind is on righteousness and purity, the gospel and witnessing. God pricks our hearts, reveals that we are failing and coming short. God stirs us to get our minds back upon living like we should—upon pressing for perfection.

**“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).**

**“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Co. 13:11).**

**“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ep. 4:13).**

**“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28).**

**“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God” (He. 6:1).**

**“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (Js. 4:1).**

e. Paul maintained the growth he had already achieved. Too many live up and down lives. We gain some discipline and some growth, then before too long, we slip right back. It may involve …

• lying, stealing, or cheating

• devotions or prayer

• control of thoughts and mind

• discipline of body and habits

Growth takes place, but then some circumstance or interruption takes place, and the *new man* and new growth are forsaken and we slip back into being the *old man*, living just like we used to live.

But note the strong exhortation of Scripture: take what you have learned and attained and walk by that rule; keep your mind upon that rule.

**“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Ro. 8:6).**

**“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Ga. 5:16).**

**“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (Ep. 5:15).**

**“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7).**