

PRESSING ON:
PAUL'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY —
REJECTING SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS
AND SEEKING PERFECTION
PHILIPPIANS 03:04–16

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 favour
- 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 favour — 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.

- I. Paul had achieved the height in self-righteousness (vv. 4-6).
- II. Paul sought to win Christ — His righteousness and perfection (vv. 7-11).
- III. Paul did not count himself as having yet arrived — he was not yet perfect (vv. 12-16).

I. *Philippians 03:04–06 Self-righteousness, Paul*

Paul had achieved the height of self-righteousness. Paul ranks among the greatest of men who have attempted to work their way into God's presence. Paul did all the good he could to secure God's approval. Few if any men have ever attained what Paul did by human effort. Yet, it was all to no avail. His goodness and his attainments did not make him acceptable to God. And there is one primary reason: he could not make himself perfect.

However, note what Paul says: "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, *I have more*. I can trust and boast in the goodness and morality and works of the flesh as much as any man who has ever lived." This is a phenomenal claim, but Paul lists seven privileges and achievements which show the total inadequacy of man to save himself. Paul divided the list under "Privileges of Birth" and "Achievements by Self-Effort."

1. The privileges of birth are three in particular.

- a. "Circumcised on the eighth day": Paul was saying that he had the *right birth*. A true Jewish family always had its male child circumcised when he was just eight days old. Circumcision was the sign that a person believed in God and in His promises — in particular the promise that the Jews were the promised and covenant people of God. Paul was claiming to be a true Jewish believer who had the privilege of believing parents.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in birth nor in religious rituals and ceremonies. Yet, how many people think they are acceptable to God because they...

- have godly parents?
- have a godly spouse?
- have godly children?
- have godly friends?
- have kept religious rituals and ceremonies?

How many expect the godliness of others to rub off on them — to count for them and to make them acceptable to God?

- b. “Of the people of Israel”: Paul was saying that he had the *right national heritage* and a very special relationship with God. He was born in the right nation, among the right people. The name *Israel* goes back to the time when God changed Jacob's name to Israel. Jacob had a special need, and God met his need in a very special way through a dream and changed his name (Gen. 32:28). When a Jew wished to stress his special relationship to God, he called himself an Israelite; that is, he was of the nation and descent of Israel which had a very special relationship with God and who had received a very special name from God.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in ancestors nor in social superiority. Yet, how many think that being born in a Christian nation and surrounded by Christian principles carry some merit with God? How many feel that the people of a so called Christian nation are more acceptable to God than the heathen of some idol-worshipping tribe in the depths of a jungle? How many feel that they have some merit with God because they have a Christian name? How many feel they have a little better relationship with God and are a little more acceptable to God because they live in a so called religious nation?

- c. “Of the tribe of Benjamin”: Benjamin was considered the aristocratic tribe of Israel because of the tribe's loyalty when so many were disloyal (1 Kng. 12:1) and because of the tribe's courageous acts throughout Israel's history (Judg. 5:14; Hos. 5:8). Paul was saying that he was of the *highest aristocracy, of the most noble, of the most respectable persons of Israel.*

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in social or religious status. Yet, how many feel they are *more acceptable* to God because they belong to...

- an upper class?
- a more elite church?
- a more dynamic church?
- a more active ministry?

2. The achievements by self-effort are four in number.

- a. “A Hebrew of Hebrews”: Paul claimed to have the *right language* and the *right customs*. When the Jews were conquered and scattered over the world, a believing Jew refused to give up his Jewish language and customs. He continued using Hebrew and he continued to practice Jewish customs. Every Jew did not, but Paul says he and his

family did. What Paul meant was that he had the mark of faithfulness. He had deliberately kept the Hebrew tongue and refused to forget it. In his day, this was extremely difficult, for the Jews were literally scattered across the world and the world had one common language, Greek. But Paul remained steadfast. He learned and refused to forget the right language. He was loyal to the elect race of God. He was untainted by other philosophies.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in religious faithfulness, nor in a spiritual language, nor in the ability to know and speak in religious terms. Yet, how many think that they are acceptable to God because they..

- do good and are faithful in being good?
- are faithful in studying their religion, the Bible, and the great doctrines of the faith?
- are faithful in talking about and sharing spiritual things?
- know and use religious terms and languages?

- b. “A Pharisee”: Paul claimed to have had the *right religion*, to have been a Pharisee. The Pharisees were strict religionists, so strict their very name meant *The Separated Ones*. Paul said that he was of the strictest religious sect ever known. He devoted his whole life to the most *separated* and demanding religion ever known to man. He achieved *separation*, an exacting separation from other men.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in religion, not even in being a follower of the true religion. Yet, how many feel the very opposite?

- c. “Zeal”: Paul had zealously stood and fought for his religion. He hotly pursued and persecuted the church. Paul had such a zeal for his religion that he sought to wipe out any cause that differed from his (Acts 22:2-21; 26:4-33; 1 Cor. 15:8-10; Gal. 1:13).

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in religious commitments or zeal. Few have ever been committed to their religion like Paul — few have ever been as faithful to the worship services, ordinances, rituals and ceremonies of his religion as Paul. Paul was a religionist among religionists. Few have ever proclaimed and protected their religion like Paul. Paul was as zealous as a person could be in trying to reach converts for his religion and in keeping his religion as pure as he could. Paul was full of zeal for his religion, as faithful as a person could be.

- d. “Faultless”: Paul claimed he had sought to keep the law and he had kept it — completely and fully. This does not mean that Paul was sinless; it means that when Paul sinned, he obeyed the law and took his sacrifice to the temple. He obeyed all the commandments, rituals and ceremonies just like Scripture said. He followed all the laws and instructions of the Scripture. He was faultless — ritually and ceremonially — in the righteousness of the law.

Thought 1. Paul was saying that goodness and righteousness are not found in keeping all the rituals and ceremonies of religion. They are not even found in keeping all the commandments of the Scripture.

Mat 5:20 “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Mat 7:22-23 “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

Rom 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Rom 10:3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Prov 20:6 Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?

Prov 30:12 Those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth.

II. *Philippians 03:07–11 Righteousness and Perfection*

Paul sought to win Christ, to win His righteousness and His perfection. The one thing in life that Paul sought was the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ. He knew that no matter how good he could become, he could never become perfect. He still came short and he was still doomed to face death. Therefore, his only hope for living forever was the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ. He had to trust Christ; he had to focus his heart and life — all he was and had — upon Jesus Christ. He had to trust the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ to *cover him*. Therefore, he cast his heart and life upon Christ. He lived for Jesus Christ, and he trusted God to honour his commitment. He trusted God to *count his faith* as the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ. If God did not do this, he was lost and doomed to death forever: he could never gain perfection. His only hope was Christ and Christ alone. This is what the present passage is all about. Paul believed with all his heart that if he trusted Jesus Christ — that if he sought after the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ with all that he was and had — God would take his faith and *count it as righteousness*. God would honour his commitment to His Son by accepting and giving him eternal life. Note five significant points.

1. Paul had a *past experience* with Christ: there was a time when he had counted *his own righteousness* as loss (v. 7). Paul was referring to his conversion experience. There was a time when he had given up his own self-righteousness and works, his own attempts to become perfect. There was a time when he had accepted the fact that he could not become perfect — he could not gain righteousness — he could not make himself perfectly acceptable to God.

- a. Note that this is a past experience, a once-for-all experience. It is a definite time when Paul made a definite decision — a decision that he was unable to secure righteousness and perfection himself. If he was to become righteous and perfect, he had to trust the love of God — that God loved him enough to cover him with the righteousness and perfection of Christ.
- b. Note also that this did not mean that Paul quit trying to live for God. On the contrary, it meant that Paul tried more diligently than ever to live for God. When God saw Paul's total commitment to Christ, God knew that Paul's faith was genuine. He knew that Paul really believed that Christ was his Saviour, his hope for perfection and righteousness — for eternity. If Paul had not committed himself totally to Christ, God would have known his faith was not genuine and God would not have saved Paul.

Thought 1. God sees our faith; whether or not it is genuine. Genuine faith makes a total commitment to Jesus Christ. A person who truly believes in Jesus Christ gives all he is and has to Christ. He counts his own effort and works, his own righteousness as loss — as nothing — in order to gain Christ.

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

2. Paul had a continuous experience with Christ: he constantly counted all things as loss and as waste in order to win Christ (v. 8). The word *consider* is in the present tense; it is continuous action. When a person has made the decision to seek after Christ, he is *to continue* to seek after the knowledge of Christ — to learn all he can about the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ.
 - => It is not a matter of making a decision to follow Christ, and then turning and walking on as a person has always walked — doing his own thing and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind, the cravings of our sinful nature and thoughts.
 - => It is making a decision to follow Christ and continuing to seek after the knowledge of Him — continuing to seek to know Him more and more.
- a. Note that the knowledge of Christ is said to be great: it is the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. The knowledge of Jesus Christ is the greatest knowledge in all the world. No other knowledge can give a person righteousness and perfection. No other knowledge can make a person acceptable to God and give him the right to live eternally.
- b. Note what Paul says: "I have lost all things." The words "have lost" mean to forfeit and to cast away. The phrase *all things* includes not only the religious position Paul

had attained, but the “social, financial, intellectual and political” gains he had made as well (Lehman Strauss, *Devotional Studies in Philippians*, p. 163). Wuest gives a graphic description of what Paul gave up to become a Christian believer.

“Paul was a citizen of Tarsus. At the time he lived there, only families of wealth and reputation were allowed to retain their Tarsian citizenship. This throws a flood of light upon Paul's early life. He was born into a home of wealth and culture. His family were wealthy Jews living in one of the most progressive of oriental cities. All this Paul left to become a poor itinerant missionary.”

“But not only did he forfeit all this when he was saved, but his parents would have nothing to do with a son who had in their estimation dishonoured them by becoming one of those hated, despised Christians. They had reared him in the lap of luxury, had sent him to the Jewish school of theology in Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the great Gamaliel, and had given him an excellent training in Greek culture at the University of Tarsus, a Greek school of learning. But they had now cast him off. He was still forfeiting all that he had held dear, what for? He tells us, ‘that I may win Christ’” (Kenneth S. Wuest. *Wuest's Word Studies*, Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966, p. 91).

Mat 10:28 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Luke 5:27 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him.

Luke 9:24 “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

Luke 14:33 “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

Luke 18:29-30 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.”

Phil 3:8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

3. Paul sought a future experience with Christ: he sought to be found in Christ (v. 9). Paul was looking ahead either to death or to the return of Christ. When he came face to face with God, he wanted to be *found in Christ*. He wanted to stand before God in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, not in his own righteousness.

Note that the righteousness of God is *Christ Himself*. The righteousness of God does not refer to behaviour or works or deeds of righteousness. No person can ever secure the righteousness of God by behaviour or works or deeds — no matter how good the works or deeds may be. The righteousness of God is Jesus Christ Himself. A person has to trust the righteousness of Christ to cover him if he wishes to become acceptable to God.

Phil 3:9 *And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

Rom 3:21-22 *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.*

Rom 10:3-4 *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*

1 Cor 1:30 *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

4. Paul sought a victorious experience with Christ: he sought to know Christ — to know His glorious power over the world and all that is in the world (v. 10). This is one of the Bible's great verses of Scripture, a verse that should be memorized and that should dominate the believer's life. As clearly seen throughout this whole passage, Paul's great pursuit in life was to know Christ. This verse spells out exactly what he meant by knowing Christ.
 - a. To know Christ is to know the power of His resurrection. The power of the Lord's resurrection refers to three great things (see *Power*; Eph. 1:20).
 - b. To know Christ is to know the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings. Most of us are willing to share in the blessings of Christ but we want nothing to do with the sufferings of Christ. We shrink from the ridicule, questioning and abuse He had to bear. There is nothing pleasant about suffering pain and having people oppose us. There is nothing wrong with being honest about the fact. Paul said that he wanted to know the *fellowship* of the Lord's sufferings. That is, he wanted to share in *the purpose for which Christ was suffering*. Why did Christ suffer? He suffered because He proclaimed the righteousness and salvation of God — because He proclaimed the way men could become acceptable to God and live forever. Paul was saying that he wanted to suffer right along with Christ, suffer for the same cause — suffer for proclaiming the righteousness and salvation of God.

There is no question about it: if we live for Christ — proclaim the righteousness and salvation of God — we shall suffer persecution. Why? Why would the world persecute

anyone who brings the hope of eternal life to them? Because some persons want to live their lives like they want, and a righteous life and message condemns them. Therefore, they oppose anything that keeps them from living a life that pleases their own personal desires and flesh (sinful nature). The believer must know: he shall suffer persecution if he truly follows Christ.

Acts 14:22 Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

Phil 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

2 Tim 2:10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

2 Tim 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

1 Pet 3:14-16 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

1 Pet 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Note one other thing: God draws close to the believer when he suffers for the cause of Christ. God gives a very special sense of His presence, love and care when the believer is suffering. In fact, His presence is so near and dear it is called "the Spirit of glory and of God" which rests upon the suffering believer.

1 Pet 4:14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

- c. To know Christ is to be made conformable to His death. Jesus Christ subjected Himself totally to God. He put His own flesh or nature and desires to death: He did only what God willed and desired. Even when He died, His flesh (nature) did not desire to die. He did not want to take the sins of the world upon Himself and be separated from God (see Mt. 26:39, 42). But He subjected Himself to God's will. God willed Him to die for the sins of the world: therefore, Christ subjected His flesh and desires to do exactly what God willed. He subjected His flesh and desires and died for the sins of men.

Paul sought to be conformed to the death of Christ. He sought to subject himself totally to God — to put his flesh and desires to death and to do only the will and desire of God.

=> Paul sought to *deny himself and take up the cross* of Christ daily.

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

=> Paul sought to *crucify his old person* with Christ.

Rom 6:6 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

=> Paul sought to count himself dead to sin but alive to God.

Rom 6:11 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

=> Paul sought to *face death* all day long.

Rom 8:36 *As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

=> Paul sought to *die every day*.

1 Cor 15:31 *I die every day — I mean that, brothers — just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

=> Paul sought to be always *given to death* for Jesus' sake.

2 Cor 4:11 *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

=> Paul sought to be crucified with Christ.

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

=> Paul sought to *die with Christ*.

Col 2:20 *Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules.*

2 Tim 2:11 *Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him.*

5. Paul sought an eternal experience with Christ: he sought to be resurrected from the dead (v. 11). Paul sought to use all means — to commit himself totally — for this one great purpose: to attain to the resurrection of the dead. The word "somehow" is not expressing doubt and uncertainty. Paul was not questioning the resurrection nor if he would be resurrected. Paul was simply saying what he had already stated (vv. 7-11). He uses all he is and has — all the means at his disposal — for this one great purpose:

to attain to the resurrection from the dead. He is totally committed to that glorious day of redemption. He lives for that day and for that day alone.

What is so significant about the resurrection of the dead? What is to be so different about that day? At death, we go to be with the Lord. Quicker than the eye can blink, when our time comes, we shall stand face to face with Christ. What is the difference between meeting Christ then and the resurrection? Why did Paul long for the resurrection over and above his meeting the Lord at death? There are at least two significant reasons why the resurrection, the glorious day of redemption, takes precedence over our meeting the Lord at death.

- a. The glorious day of resurrection will launch the events that will soon bring about the new heavens and earth. At death, when we go to be with the Lord, the world continues on in its sin and shame, disease and death, evil and corruption. *God is still being...*
 - cursed and dishonored
 - denied and ignored
 - rebelled against and rejected

But as stated, the resurrection will launch the events that bring about the glorious day of redemption — the new heavens and earth — the day when all evil and sin and the cursing and dishonour of God will be stopped. God will become All in All: worshipped and served in glory and majesty, dominion and power forever and ever.

John 5:28-29 *“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*

John 6:40 *“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

John 11:25 *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”*

Acts 24:15 *And I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.*

2 Cor 4:14 *Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.*

1 Th 4:16-17 *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

2 Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Rev 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*

- b. The glorious day of resurrection will be the day when believers will have earthly bodies transformed and recreated into perfect eternal bodies. At death when we go to be with the Lord, we do not receive our perfect eternal body. We will either be given temporary spiritual bodies or live with Christ as disembodied spirits. But as stated, at the resurrection the elements of our present bodies will be called forth by God from all over the world, and the elements shall be transformed into perfect and eternal bodies. And we shall live with and for God forever.

1 Cor 15:42-44 *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

1 Cor 15:49-54 *And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” (see 1 Cor. 15:12-58)*

2 Cor 5:1-4 *Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

Phil 3:20-21 *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring*

everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

III. *Philippians 03:12–16 Paul's Perfection*

Paul did not count himself as having yet obtained — 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 obtained perfection. In fact, he was always emphasizing how far short he came.

Rom 7:18-19 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.

Eph 3:8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

2 Cor 3:5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.

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.

1. Paul followed after perfection, after his God-given purpose. When Christ saved Paul, it 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 *press* (dioko) means to follow after; 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 from the dead — and as long as Paul was on this earth, he was going to press on 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.

1 Cor 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

2 Cor 4:7-8 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair.

Gal 5:7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?

Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

2. 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 Rom. 7:18-19; 2 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 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 one thing I do.*

In one focused act, we must forget the things that are past and straining to those things that are before us. The act involves two parts: both forgetting and straining toward. The past cannot be forgotten without straining toward 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.

Luke 13:24 *“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”*

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

Gal 6:9 *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

Col 1:29 *To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.*

Heb 12:4 *In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*

1 Pet 1:13 *Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Rev 3:11 *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

3. 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 honour 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, Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:42-44.)

Rom 8:16-17 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Rom 8:29 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Phil 3:21 *Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Col 3:24 *Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

1 John 3:2 *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

4. 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
- possessions and recognition
- more and more
- pleasure and plenty
- indulgence and extravagance

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.

Mat 5:48 *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

2 Cor 13:11 *Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*

Eph 4:13 *Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Col 1:28 *We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.*

Heb 6:1 *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.*

James 4:1 *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?*

5. 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 person* and new growth are forsaken and we slip back into being the *old person*, living just like we used to live.

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

Rom 8:6 *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

Gal 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

Eph 5:15 *Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise.*

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

1 John 2:6 *Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. ■*