

Paul had just written that he had given up everything he once valued for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. Everything else was a detriment, and considered worthless. His goal is to be found in Christ Jesus, living in resurrection power, sharing in Christ's suffering, and becoming like Jesus in His death. (3:10) Paul wanted to know that on the day the last trumpet sounds and the dead in Christ rise, he'd be right there with all the other saints, receiving his new body, perfected, forever with the Lord. (1Corinthians 15:52-53)

**Commented [Paul1]: Philippians 3:10 (ESV)**  
<sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

We have to know what he had just said to understand the next passage. <sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* It's not that he does not already know Christ, but that he knows there is so much more to know. He knows that we now see through a glass darkly but then we'll see Him face to face and know Him as we are known. (1Corinthians 13:12) Meanwhile, he wants to keep pressing into Christ, living to know Him more each day. He wants to be found in Him as he walks through this life facing all the opportunities and the suffering that God allows to come our way. (Matthew 11:12) He knows there is more of Jesus for him to experience in this life.

**Commented [Paul2]: 1 Corinthians 15:52 (ESV)**  
<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.  
<sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

Think about it! If the great Apostle Paul who saw the glorified Jesus, who was caught up to the third heaven (2Corinthians 12:2), who raised the dead and cast out demons, who founded numerous churches and wrote a good part of the theology of the New Testament said he had more to take hold of, what about us? If you think you've arrived, and you are comfortable with your knowledge of Jesus, you've settled for a lot less than He has for you! Your vision is too limited. Your understanding of what Jesus wants to do in and through you is way too small. We'll return to this thought at the end of our passage for today.

**Commented [Paul3]: 1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV)**  
<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

**Commented [Paul4]: Matthew 11:12 (ESV)**  
<sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

There is a branch of the church that teaches entire sanctification. (1Thessalonians 5:23) If by that they mean they are holy in the sight of God because of what Jesus did for them, then I agree. But often the term is interpreted as being sinless. I can't agree with that. If Paul knew he hadn't arrived, I don't know why anyone would think they had.

**Commented [Paul5]: 2 Corinthians 12:2 (ESV)**  
<sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

**Commented [Paul6]: 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (ESV)**  
<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

D.L. Moody was approached by a man who made the claim. Moody shot down the whole idea with his quick witted response. "Can I talk to your wife about that?" It was great response on several levels. Those closest to us see the real person, warts and all. On a deeper level, the man who came up with the doctrine, though a great evangelist, sadly, neglected his wife. He failed to keep the command for husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church, giving Himself up for her. (Ephesians 5:25)

**Commented [Paul7]: Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)**  
<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

When Paul said he was not perfect, he didn't even mean perfect in the way we think of perfection. Perfect (*teleios*) is used in scripture and in that day in a number of ways. It was used of a mature believer as opposed to one that was still learning the basics of the faith. We see that in our last verse for today. It was used of someone who thoroughly knew their subject as opposed to a student. And in the case of offerings, it meant an unblemished sacrifice. It could mean a fully developed adult as opposed to a growing child. There are so many different uses, but you get the idea that it means to have arrived at maturity.

Paul was saying that he was still a growing Christian. The early Christians referred to martyrs as having been perfected by the sword and the day of their death as the day of their perfecting.<sup>1</sup> This is in line with Paul's theology. But that doesn't mean Paul just sits back and waits for the day of his death. He knows that he can know more of Jesus every day. He presses on to experience Jesus to a greater extent. He wants to lay hold of Christ because Christ had laid hold of him on the road to Damascus and turned his life right side up. (Acts 9:4-6)

In Paul's mind and heart, Christ is a treasure to be possessed, a treasure of surpassing worth. (3:8) All he desires is to know and love Jesus more each day.

*<sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,* Paul had not arrived. God wasn't done with him. He was still a work in progress. It was Jesus that took hold of him. He had nothing to do with his conversion. It was all God. But now that God had taken hold of him, he exerted an effort. That one effort was to forget about the past and strain forward to what God had for him that day and the next. This is not a psychological instruction to think positive, but to be passionate about living for Jesus. (Romans 12:1)

The past is past. You can't change it. You can learn from it, but take the lesson and leave the past in the past. No matter how much you think about it, it won't change what happened. Paul had poked his finger in God's eye by killing believers. (Zechariah 2:8) He can't change that. God still had mercy on him. Should I have done this or should I have avoided that? It doesn't matter now, as it is in the past. What matters now is what God has for you today.

I'll bet you struggle with this like I do. Yesterday haunts us. But it is too late to change it now. **The only time to change direction is as you go forward.** (Isaiah 30:21)

Paul used a sports term here of a runner stretching to the finish line. He doesn't rest on yesterday's victories or dwell on past failures; he strains forward to what God has for

**Commented [Paul8]:** Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT) Philippians

**Commented [Paul9]:** Acts 9:4-6 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" E

<sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" EAnd he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

<sup>6</sup> But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.

**Commented [Paul10]:** Philippians 3:8 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

**Commented [Paul11]:** Romans 12:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

**Commented [Paul12]:** Zechariah 2:8 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> For thus said the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye:

**Commented [Paul13]:** Isaiah 30:21 (ESV)

<sup>21</sup> And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it, Ewhen you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

him today. And just like a runner, you can't look back and stay focused. He wants to make the right choice and yield to the life of Christ in him this time around. He has told us in a previous letter that God has good works prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10), and he longs to do them because he experiences more of Christ when he does.

**Commented [Paul14]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup>For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We don't know what lies ahead, but we do know that whatever it is, we can experience the life of Christ going through it. We can be found in Him or we can face it in our flesh. The grace of God is always there, but are we straining toward that finish line? God does His part, but are we cooperating? Lack of cooperation is called rebellion. Paul says he gives it all he's got to cooperate with the Spirit (Galatians 5:24-25). He's watching for those opportunities. He's sensitive to the Spirit. He's listening for the still small voice.

**Commented [Paul15]: Galatians 5:24-25 (NIV)**

<sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.  
<sup>25</sup>Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

*<sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* I believe Paul is saying that the goal line is the last trumpet. The prize is the upward call. That is when we get our transformed body. He mentions that in the coming passage. (3:21) He wants to hear, "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord!" (Matthew 25:23) That's quite a goal. Jesus is the way, but am I walking in it? Am I pressing forward to make it my own?

**Commented [Paul16]: Philippians 3:21 (NIV)**

<sup>21</sup>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.

**Commented [Paul17]: Matthew 25:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup>His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." E

The more I study the New Testament, the more I find this seeming contradiction of our salvation being all a work of God and yet we are to give our all. It's as if Paul is telling us that God does it all, but then we better be sure we received it by giving it our all. (1Corinthians 15:10) He's very clear that that his deeds have nothing to do with meriting salvation, but rather are a result of our salvation. And if the Apostle Paul wanted to give it all he had to be sure he wasn't fooling himself, then I certainly want to do the same.

**Commented [Paul18]: 1 Corinthians 15:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Are you pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus? Paul tells us how careful he is in this pursuit of being in Christ. *<sup>26</sup> So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. <sup>27</sup> But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.* 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (ESV) This is about personal discipline of the body and soul like an athlete training their body because of a love for Jesus and the desire to be found in Him. Paul wants to know that the prize of the upward call is indeed his, that he has obtained it by faith and will one day experience the reality of it. You see, if you miss the resurrection of the justified, than you will rise at the Great White Throne judgment. (Revelation 20:11) You'll be justified in Christ or condemned by your own words and life lived in rebellion toward God. (Matthew 12:37)

**Commented [Paul19]: Revelation 20:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

**Commented [Paul20]: Matthew 12:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup>for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Another way to look at what he is saying is through the teaching of Jesus. You know a tree by its fruit. (Matthew 7:20) If a person thinks they are a peach tree but only grow thorns, someone is wishful thinking. Paul wants to bear the fruit of the righteous to walk worthy of the Lord to the end because of all Jesus did for him.

**Commented [Paul21]: Matthew 7:20 (NIV)**  
<sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

*<sup>15</sup> Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.* He's using the same word he just said he had not achieved, but obviously in one of the other uses. He's not already perfected/matured. Let those of us who are mature/perfected think this way. The first is the sense of God's work in him being completed. The second is of a mature believer. If you are a grown up Christian, then you should recognize how far you have yet to go.

To what way of thinking is Paul referring? It is my opinion that he means Christ is of surpassing worth. He is the prize, to be found in Him and destined for the resurrection of the just. (Luke 14:14) It's to be looking forward each day to what God has for us, straining forward to do His will each day as we are on our way to that resurrection day.

**Commented [Paul22]: Luke 14:14 (ESV)**  
<sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

To think otherwise would be to consider something in this world of value. Instead of just repeating his point or telling them to see what hasn't yet been revealed to them, he just writes that "if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you." If there is something in your life that you think is as important as Jesus, if you don't see the need to stretch forward each day to the finish line, God will show you. He loves His children. **If there is some idol, some worthless thing, something that gets in the way of our total dedication to God, then God will reveal it.** I can point it out to you, but you probably won't receive it from me. When God shows you, it sticks. No argument is needed. His conviction isn't just an opinion; it's the way it is.

I have found great comfort in this verse. When you see someone compromising but you truly believe they are God's child, you don't have to intervene unless led to do so. (James 5:20) You can warn them but then trust that God will bring conviction. He'll reveal it to them. The Holy Spirit brings conviction. I just bring my judgment and opinions, unless of course I'm acting at the leading of the Holy Spirit.

**Commented [Paul23]: James 5:20 (ESV)**  
<sup>20</sup> let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

**When the Spirit reveals the surpassing worth of Jesus, you don't have to tell the person to let go of garbage.** They will do it on their own because of the great value they have found in Jesus. They may need some advice and encouragement on how to let go, but the desire will be their own. Too often we see young Christians' lives and want to go and tell them all the things they should give up and end up discouraging them. The Spirit will convict them and they will choose to give it up on their own. Then it will be from a heart of love for their Savior not obedience to your instruction. It will come from the heart and not the head.

<sup>16</sup> *Only let us hold true to what we have attained.* God will show us where we have other affections that are not Christ, but keep living up to what has been revealed to you. Don't slide backward. (Luke 9:62) We are accountable for what we know and have seen. While we are learning and seeing more don't let go of the ground you have covered. Do what you know to be the will of God. (Ephesians 4:27)

**Commented [Paul24]:** Luke 9:62 (ESV)

<sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

**Commented [Paul25]:** Ephesians 4:27 (ESV)

<sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil.

People often ask about God's will in a given situation. If God hasn't revealed to you what you should do, just keep doing what you know to do. Keep reading the Word. Keep praying. Stay in fellowship. Keep yourself pure. Keep being a witness where God has you at the present time. Here is God's will for now, "hold true to what you have attained."

Let me read the passage to you again, this time in the New Century Version. <sup>12</sup> *I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal, but I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that, which is the reason he made me his.* <sup>13</sup> *Brothers and sisters, I know that I have not yet reached that goal, but there is one thing I always do. Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize for which God called me through Christ to the life above.* <sup>15</sup> *All of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, too. And if there are things you do not agree with, God will make them clear to you.* <sup>16</sup> *But we should continue following the truth we already have.* Philippians 3:12-16 (NCV)

We aren't yet experiencing all God has for us. We haven't reached the goal. But are we making every effort to reach the goal, forgetting the past, straining forward to reach the goal and get the prize for which Christ has called us to life above? If you are spiritually mature, that will be your mindset. If not, God will make it clear to you. But whatever place we are at spiritually, we should live up to the truth we already have. Amen?

What a passion Paul had for Jesus! Will you dare to pray to have the same?

#### Questions

- 1 What is the context for this passage?
- 2 If Paul wanted more of Jesus then...
- 3 Are you entirely sanctified?
- 4 What are the various meanings of "perfect"?
- 5 What effort does Paul exert?
- 6 What is Paul's goal?
- 7 Which resurrection are you aiming for?
- 8 What is the second use of the word "perfect"?

- 9 How do mature believers think?
- 10 What if someone doesn't?
- 11 What do we do in the meantime?