

PERFECT, AND YET PRESSING
Phil. 3:10-15

Intro: In Paul's letter to the Philippian Church we have a delightful little treatise on the life of a Christian.

Paul is writing from a Roman prison, or at least from confinement in Rome. And he undoubtedly has had time to reflect upon his own life as a servant of Christ, comparing it with what it was and might have continued to be had he not turned to Christ.

Much of this is stated in chapter 3.

Chapter 1 makes it clear that he had been thinking about death--which seemed to be a real possibility. He had also been thinking about his ministry.

Chapter 2 gives some indication that he had battled with the problem of wondering if it is possible to live for the Lord in such a world.

In chapter 3 he reminds himself of what he used to have as a religious Jew, and he compares that with what he has now in Christ. BUT NEVER ARE HIS THOUGHTS CLEARER, AND NEVER IS HIS WRITING MORE SPECIFIC CONCERNING WHAT WAS IMPORTANT FOR THE PRESENT--AND WHAT HE COULD EXPECT IN THE FUTURE.

Any person who had just accepted Christ could come to this epistle and be grounded in the basic truths of the Christian life.

Let us think of it in three tenses:

- 1) Where we stand at the present time.
- 2) What we should do in the immediate future, i.e., today, and tomorrow, and the next day, etc.
- 3) What we can expect at the end--which may not be too far away.

I. WHERE DO WE STAND AT THE PRESENT TIME?

Here we need to understand one word, and to note that Paul uses it in two ways. The word, perfect.

In v. 15 Paul says that he (and others, "us") are perfect; in v. 12 he says that he is not perfect. HOW CAN THIS BE?

The word itself means, complete. It has to do with God's purpose in redeeming us, which is much more than just to deliver us from hell--as wonderful as that is. But God has a purpose, and when that purpose is finished, we will

be complete. But it is not yet finished. Therefore, we have what he has written in v. 12.

What is that purpose? Cf. 3:20, 21; 1 John 3:1, 2; Rom. 8:28, 29.

How can we ever achieve that? This is where v. 15 comes in. There is another sense in which we can speak of ourselves as "perfect," not sinless, but completely what God wants us to be. This is our condition before Him. And this is used this way because:

- 1) The goal is absolutely certain for every child of God, and
- 2) We have already received the blessings and the promises which assure that we shall reach that goal. Cf. 1:6; Eph. 1:3-14. Therefore, from God's point-of-view we are already perfect because the future is absolutely guaranteed.

Thus, you see I have answered the first and the last of the three questions we started out with:

- 1) Where do we stand at the present time? We are "perfect" in God's sight, but not in experience. There is more to come. But right now we already possess all that is necessary for the attainment of the goal.
- 3) What can we expect at the end? We can expect to be like Him, our Lord, when we in experience receive "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

In view of all of this, we must now ask,

II. WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE?

Notice the expression which Paul uses:

- 1) "I follow after." Cf. v. 12.
- 2) "Reaching forth unto those things which are before" (v. 13).
- 3) "I press toward the mark . . ." (v. 14).

Here you have the human side of Christian experience.

The word, "prize," is only found here and in 1 Cor. 9:24. Let us see if the other passage will help us to understand it. To "press" means to stretch out one's head and body toward the goal--the picture you have often seen of track men in newspapers. It means that this is the one thing which takes precedence over every other thing so that every energy we have is devoted to this.

But how is this done?

There are many things that enter into this. We could speak now of Bible study, or of prayer, or of obedience to the Word, of ministry. BUT LET ME CENTER IN TONIGHT ON THE ONE THING WHICH PAUL MENTIONS. It is so easy for us to take expressions like this and leave the epistle to the Philippians, but it is inconceivable that Paul would speak about such a subject and not tell us mainly what it means to "press toward the mark."

Let me point it out in this way: When you read vv. 4-6 and compare them with vv. 7-11, WHAT IS THE MAIN DIFFERENCE? What was the difference between Paul's life before he became a Christian, and after? One word will answer that: Christ.

See it in v. 7, then in v. 8, and in v. 9; finally, in vv. 10, 11.

Concl: What is it going to mean? It is going to mean that you and I are going to have to be like a runner preparing for and running in a race. We must run knowing that there will be a difference (which we may not be able to understand now) even though we all will reach the goal.

Charles Simeon, who I believe is credited with starting the Inter-Varsity Fellowship wrote in one of his last letters, "I am so near the goal that I cannot help running with all my might" (Moule on Philippians, p. 68).

Do you really long to know HIM? Are you willing to drop whatever would hinder this, and to do whatever will help you in your walk with Him?

Does the world mean more to you than the Word, and the Lord? Then you are not pressing very hard.

Can men begin to see what we ultimately will be? Nothing in all the world is more important than for you and me to know Him, increasingly, intimately, fervently, devotedly. It is only as we follow on to know Him (Hosea 6:3) that our arrival at the goal will be filled with the joy which should be experienced by every child of God.