

## **REACHING FOR THE PRIZE**

### **Philippians 3:12-16**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

I love athletics/sports. I played baseball, basketball, soccer, diving. In college, I got interested in gymnastics, martial arts, and running. Since I moved to Arizona, I have been mountain biking.

I have had this rule for my children - which was somewhat interrupted because of my beloved's struggles - that I won't tell you which sport to play but you must play a sport.

Why do I say all this? Well ... I have an ally. Someone you know who also really loves sports. I'm not talking about **Scott Malm** ☺ I'm talking about **Paul**. → Directly from our text

#### **READ Phil 3:12-16**

**Proposition:** Paul's Salvation:

- I. Clarified**
- II. Applied**

**So That:** Encourage and warn us → We aim at the right target

#### **I. Paul's Salvation Clarified                      3:12-14**

Point – A Perfection:

- A. Not Yet Attained**
- B. Diligently Pursued**
- C. Divinely Guaranteed**

#### **A. A Perfection Not Yet Attained**

Point – Paul dealt a death blow to **legalism**. Now he draws his sights on **perfectionism** and **antinomianism**.

**Perfectionism:** the wrong thinking that somehow, on this side of glory, a Christian can reach a state of perfection, where he/she is completely free of sin on this side of glory.

**Proof** – “<sup>12a</sup>**Not that I have already obtained *it*, or have already become perfect**”

- Acknowledgement that we still fall short!
- Paul’s struggle against sin, fear, and doubt is not yet over.

“<sup>13a</sup>**Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet;**”

“**Brethren**” – a term of affection and intimacy to move the hearts of the Philippians toward him.

- Paul reminds his readers he loves them.
- And we are in this together.

“**I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet**”

- acknowledgement of “We’re not there yet”
- Paul saying he has not yet arrived!

**Illustration** – A man came up to a preacher who had just preached a sermon in which he said he had achieved a state of perfection. And the man said, “Do you mind if I ask your wife whether you’ve achieved the state of perfection?” The preacher responded, “Well, you can ask her, but she doesn’t believe in this doctrine yet.” → I’m sure. I can tell you exactly why she doesn’t believe in this doctrine yet!

**Application** – Brothers, we are not the fellowship of “the arrived.” We are the fellowship of “the already, not yet”.

Paul can see that he’s got a long way to go, but he doesn’t sit back and spectate. He doesn’t sulk. He doesn’t hold a pity party. He doesn’t grumble. He presses on.

A Perfection **Not Yet Attained**, ...

## B. A Perfection **Diligently Pursued**

Point – Paul deals his death blow to **Perfectionism**. Now, he deals his death blow to **Antinomianism**.

Antinomianism - no law; that is the heresy salvation position that says if you made the profession that you are in Christ, it doesn't matter what your behavior looks like

Perfection and the prize are not attained in this life.  
But perfection and the prize are not attained in the eternal life  
→ **Unless they are pursued in this life.**

Proof - “**but I press on**” – διω,κω – same word translated as “persecutor” in v. 6 – the same zealouslyness → I run, I pursue, I chase. This word was used in the Greco-Roman times to describe a sprinter. Paul says I’m running after this with all my strength!

The word is vigorous, ‘I pursue as a hunter’ – that’s the image

- the word describes a long distance runner, going on and on.
- like a hunter hungry for food
- like a marathon runner seeing the finishing tape.”

**Illustration** – My beloved brother Rob Provost posted a tweet on June 10, 2015. It was a picture of the children and I walking to our car after the Celebration of Life service for my beloved Margie – and his quote was “The Miller family pressing on.”

“<sup>13b</sup>**but one thing *I do***” – depending upon your Bible, you might see “*I do*” in italics which means these words are not in the original Greek.

literally – “**but one thing!**”

→ complete focus, total concentration

→ tune out the surroundings! Tune out the distractions!

**Illustration – Martyn Lloyd-Jones** – *“The man who runs in a race must not be interested in the landscape. If he begins to look at the mountains and the charm of the flowers in the hedgerows, he will not win the race; he must be intent on one thing only.”*

*A man was driving his car along a narrow road on his way to visit a farm, when he suddenly came upon a flock of sheep and a sheep dog. He described the amazing way in which the sheep dog dealt with the situation, how he kept his eyes upon the flock, running backwards and forwards. The interesting thing was a little terrier came out of a nearby house and tried to pick a quarrel with the sheep dog, coming and barking at him. The writer of the article pointed out the magnificence of the sheep dog who completely ignored the yapping terrier. He knew he had a great job to do – so he didn’t pay any attention to the terrier: ‘One thing I do,’ said the sheep dog.*

*This is the way in which Christians are to work. They don’t look at the distractions – the world is full of distracting interests, some of them legitimate, some not.*

*→ But those who want to be like the Apostle Paul don’t look at them – only at one thing!”*

How do we do this?

- 1) We leave behind
- 2) We stretch forward
- 3) We press on

- 1) Leave behind

Proof - “<sup>13c</sup>**forgetting what lies behind**”

**Illustration** - We’ve all watched a runner look back over his shoulder and get passed on the other side.

**Luke 9:62** – “Jesus said to him, ‘No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

As **Adam** and **Eve** walked by the grave where their murdered son **Abel** lay buried, did they ever say, “didn’t that fruit taste like nothing else you’ve ever tasted”?

## 2) Stretch forward

men ... de – in the original language it says - on the one hand ... on the other hand - the contrast is clear

“<sup>13d</sup>**and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,**”

– ἐπεκτείνωμαι – *hapax* – strain forward, stretch a muscle to its limit, double prepositions added to Intensify!!

→ This is a runner stretching every muscle to reach the finish line in front of him. Focused concentration, looking at the goal.

**George Whitefield** – “*I am never better than when I am on full stretch for God.*”

This is perseverance, discipline, and concentration.

**David Livingstone** told the London Missionary Society in his early years as a missionary in Africa:

“*I’m willing to go in any direction, provided it is forward.*”

## 3) Press on

“<sup>14a</sup>**I press on toward the goal**”

“**goal**” – only New Testament appearance of this word (*hapax*). It is an athletic word for the finish line, the mark, the goal.

**Illustration** – This is not like the man in a hurry who jumped in the cab shouting, “Go fast!” And the cab sped away. After some time, the man realized, they were going very fast, but wandering aimlessly. He asked the cabbie what he was doing and where they were going. The cabbie responded, “You only said, ‘Go fast.’ You didn’t mention a destination.”

**Application** – In the same way, we must not run frenzied in life. We have a goal that has been laid out for us. The goal is perfection. We will not attain it in this life but it is the goal. That is the finish line we are running towards.

A Perfection **Not Yet Attained**,

A Perfection **Diligently Pursued** ...

### C. A Perfection **Divinely Guaranteed**

Point – Charles Spurgeon founded a Pastor’s College in London to train preachers. Its motto was: *Teneo et Teneor*, which means, “I hold and I am held.” Human responsibility and divine sovereignty.

Proof – “<sup>12c</sup>**in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.**”

- the purpose statement – maturity, sanctification

“**obtained**” – from Greek word λαμβάνω – obtain, receive  
“**lay hold ... laid hold**” – from Greek word καταλαμβάνω – intensified with κατά

→ capture, overtake, seize, grab with force, overpower

**Mark 9:17-18** – “One of the crowd answered Him, ‘Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; <sup>18</sup>and whenever it seizes him’”

What was Christ Jesus’ goal in seizing me, seizing you?

→ a redeemed humanity, transformed from glory to glory

**John 17:24** – “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world”

A **promise** came out of God’s **love** in eternity past.

“<sup>14b</sup>**for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**”

“**prize**” – only here and in parallel passage **1 Cor 9:24** – “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win (καταλαμβάνω!!! ☺).”

The “**prize**” is eternal fellowship with Christ.

**Amy Carmichael** was missionary to India. She served in India for 55 years without furlough – “Give me the love that leads the way, the faith that nothing can dismay, the hope no disappointments tire, the passion that will burn like fire. Let me not sink to be a clod; Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.”

By the way, in the original Greek, both v. 12 and v. 14 end with “ <b>Christ Jesus</b> ” - <u>by</u> Christ Jesus and <u>in</u> Christ Jesus
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**2 Tim 1:9** – “who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity” - literally, before time began.

**Illustration** – All of this athletic imagery would resonate well in Philippi. The Greeks knew about sacrificial service. In their great **Battle at Marathon** against the Persians in 490 B.C., many Greeks laid down their lives fighting the more numerous Persian army. The legend is they sent their star runner, Pheidippides, to take the good news of victory home. He ran the 26 miles from **Marathon** to **Athens** even though he had been hurt in the battle.

With his heart bursting Pheidippides entered the gates, came to the city leaders, and shouted, “Rejoice, we have won!” At which point, the legend continues, his heart burst and he died.

**Illustration** – Beloved, every man must do two things alone; he must do his own believing and his own dying.

**Richard Baxter** – *“It is a most lamentable thing to see how most people spend their time and their energy for trifles, while God is cast aside. He who is all seems to them as nothing, and that which is nothing seems to them as good as all. It is lamentable indeed, knowing that God has set mankind in such a race where heaven or hell is their certain end, that they should sit down and loiter, or run after the childish toys of the world, forgetting the prize they should run for.”*

## **II. Paul’s Salvation Applied 3:15-16**

Point – Paul applies his personal story with an

- A. An Exhortation**
- B. A Consolation**
- C. An Admonition**

**Paul** applies his story with:

### **A. An Exhortation 3:15a**

Point – urgently and emphatically urging someone to do something

Proof – <sup>15a</sup> **Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude;**”

“**perfect**” – mature

“**have this attitude**” – literally means to “think this way” → like-minded!

**Illustration** – Maybe some of you have seen the phrase at churches that says “No perfect people allowed.” A church on Dobson N of Germann has a permanent kiosk with this phrase - “No Perfect People Allowed” - etched into stone.

What they are really saying is that we are messed up and you can come be messed up with us.

→ This reflects an unbelievable inane naivety, an intense level of mindless gullibility.

I understand that there may be good intent behind this. But what God is saying is that you can be perfect - perfect in terms of mature. You better be more mature today than you were one year ago.

**Application** – I like **J.C. Ryle** much better than the silly statement, “no perfect people allowed.”

In his book Holiness, Ryle describes **Mature Christians** – *“their sense of sin is deeper... their faith stronger... their hope brighter... their love more extensive”*

## **B. A Consolation**

**3:15b**

Point – A gracious consolation of encouragement to the downtrodden

Proof – “<sup>15b</sup>**and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;**”

“**reveal**” – from the Greek word ἀποκαλύπτω, from which we get the English word “apocalypse”

- unveil, uncover

This is improved condition. This is NOT improved position. This is sanctification - we looked at that in v.10 last week.

**Illustration** – Remember the story of The Tortoise and The Hare? I was trail running on South Mountain, two guys on bicycles passed me. Sometime later, I came up on them changing a flat tire so I passed them. Sometime later, they passed me again. Some later, yet again, I passed them fiddling

around with something else. One of the guys said as I passed them, “The Tortoise and the Hare.”

**Application** – In the same way, you keep on keeping on. Keep running the race!

### C. An Admonition 3:16

Point – an exhortation with an element of warning.

Proof – “<sup>16</sup>**however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.**”

“**keep living**” – literally: be drawn up or advance in line, belong in the ranks of soldiers; figuratively: be in harmony or agreement with, hold to, live in conformity with

Word translated in

- Acts 21:24 (“walk orderly”)
- Rom 4:12 (“follow”)
- Gal 5:25; 6:16 (“walk”)

“**keep living by that same *standard*”** – literally, keep following in line. The path, the way, following the Teacher, the Master as revealed in the Bible.

**Spurgeon** wrote in the “Sword and Trowel” in 1888, “*The idea of a progressive gospel seems to have fascinated many. To us that notion is a sort of cross-breed between nonsense and blasphemy. After the gospel has been found effectual in the eternal salvation of untold multitudes, it seems rather late in the day to alter it; and, since it is the revelation of the all-wise and unchanging God, it appears somewhat audacious to attempt its improvement.*”

*When we call up before our mind’s eye the gentlemen who have set themselves this presumptuous task, we feel inclined to laugh; the case is so much like the proposal of moles to*

*improve the light of the sun. Their gigantic intellects are to hatch out the meaning of the Infinite! We think we see them brooding over hidden truths to which they lend the aid of their superior genius to accomplish development!”*

**Application** – In the same way, trust the Word of God to navigate your life through the zero visibility storms of life.

## **CONCLUSION**

Paul’s final appeal to this athletic imagery

→ **2 Tim 4:7** – “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; <sup>8</sup>in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

**Illustration** – A runner doesn’t just run with his legs. He runs with his arms. And not just legs and arms, he runs with his core. He runs with his head, with his whole body, with his whole being.

In the movie **Chariots of Fire**, after getting beaten by **Eric Liddell, Harold M. Abrahams** said,

“If I can’t win, I won’t run!”

His lady friend **Sybil Gordon** responded,

“If you don’t run, you can’t win.”

**Beloved, Run the Race to Win!**

And God tells us how to do that in His Word.