

“The Goal-Directed Christian”—Philippians 3:12-14

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Goal-Directed Christian”, is Philippians 3:12-14 → *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. 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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Goals—those desires which you would like to see come to fruition in your life at some point. The importance of goals can never be underestimated. They set direction, define action and hopefully bring about a satisfied fulfillment in your life. They can be as simple as making a list of what you strive to accomplish in a given day. You may develop “life goals” intended to guide your day by day activities in the hopes that your future will be rewarding and secure. It is interesting that fulfilling the goal of entering a career brings you face to face with more goals as you

are encouraged to plan for that ultimate goal of . . . retirement.

While living life striving to accomplish many goals related to relationships, jobs, stuff and experiences, we are constantly reminded to make plans to secure our future, usually in connection with financial planning. This is difficult since you don't know what the future holds for you. Thus, to put forth a goal one must do so on the basis of some kind of faith and look for it to bring them to a determined ending point.

Our text speaks about being goal-directed Christians who move forward in life based upon a faith which brings you to a determined ending point—**being a totally complete and perfected human being**. Kind of sounds like what people are striving for in their lives everyday. The different is this: The Christian recognizes that the goal leads to a determined ending point of a life in eternity determined by your relationship with your Creator. The human being was created to live in an eternally perfect relationship with God physically.

Actually, human beings have recognized this fact in some form or another throughout history. Picture a society within which every person at least has a sense that this earthly life is not all there is to life. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says *God has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end*. In their search for that eternity people throughout the ages have developed systems of religion with man-made gods, rituals and laws in an effort to

secure the ultimate goal of *eternity* which Yahweh, “God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth” (1st article of the Creed), placed *into man’s heart*. It has been labeled paganism. Unfortunately *the end* which they are striving to obtain will end up in eternal suffering in hell, separated from God, because they strive on the basis of their own determination and not God’s determination for them.

In verse 12 of our text Paul says that he had not yet *obtained this or was already perfect* at the time he wrote this letter to the Christians in Philippi (c. 60 AD). What is the “this” or perfection to which Paul was referring? In the context he was warning the Christians to beware of false teachers who were trying to turn Christianity into paganism. They were insisting that the Gentile Christians follow the Old Testament laws, especially the requirement of circumcision, in order to truly receive eternal life. Acts 15:1 speaks about *some men who were teaching the Christians saying that unless they were circumcised according to the custom of Moses, they could not be saved*. The difference between Christianity and all other religions is this: Other religions tell you to do something to receive eternal life with God while Christianity says it’s completely done for you in the Person & Work of Jesus.

As Paul recounted his life, striving *toward the goal* of an eternal relationship with God, he put forth all his hard work of obedience to God’s Old Testament Laws, customs and ceremonies (cf. Philippians 3:4-6).

He worked hard to be the perfect human being in the sight of God and others. Now he counted all those works which people thought he could hold up to God for entry into heaven *as loss and rubbish*. Why? *Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus His Lord*. He did so *in order that he could gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of his own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, **the righteousness from God that depends on faith*** (cf. Philippians 3:8-9). Notice, being the perfect human being (i.e. righteous) is God's doing in your life. Recognizing His doing takes faith.

But there's more to it! He considered such godly "credentials" as garbage so that he might *know Jesus and the power of His resurrection . . . becoming like Him in His death, that he might attain the resurrection from the dead* (cf. Philippians 3:10-11). Jesus' death was the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins. He dealt with your sin once and for all, defeating Satan's power over you. He rose from the dead to give you the eternal life in perfect relationship with God physically. This is so important for all human beings. While people's lives are filled with goals to accomplish they eventually lead only to death. *The goal . . . of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* is yours as you trust in His atoning work for the forgiveness of your sins in repentance and faith.

Even though Paul strove for perfection and blamelessness before God in his previous way of life in Judaism (cf. Galatians 1:13), he was guilty

of all manner of sins against Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:9 he considered himself *the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of God*. Thus, when he speaks in our text about *forgetting what lies behind* he has much from his past which the devil probably threw up in his face to get him to doubt who he was as a forgiven and new creation in Christ Jesus. You can relate. Sins from your past, long forgiven by God through Christ Jesus, can creep up from your own sinful nature in an effort to tempt you into doubt and discouragement. How many times have your past failures stopped you from fulfilling your present goals in life? Like Paul, you too have not yet *obtained* the resurrection from the dead to eternal life and are not *already perfect*. Thus, it truly is an issue of perseverance this side of Christ's 2nd Coming on the Last Day.

It is at such times of struggle with temptation that we too work at *forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead and press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* (verses 13-14). It does take work and discipline to stay focused on *the goal* which Jesus Christ has already accomplished for you and is yours today by faith.

The picture of an athlete being focused on the goal ahead of him, *straining forward* and pressing on, was used by Paul to describe the importance of spiritual discipline in our lives. He said in 1 Corinthians

9:24-27 → *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

Such discipline is not actualize by your goal-setting gifts or techniques. Such discipline is not realized by some resolve within yourself to “think you can.” The goal-directed Christian is motivated by Jesus fulfilling the goal for you and taking hold of you in your baptism and through His Holy Spirit everyday. The Christian presses *on to make* eternity with God his *own, because Christ Jesus has made* him or her *His own* (verse 12). The Greek literally says that you press on “to take hold of that **for which Christ Jesus took hold of you.**” He has His grip on you.

As you live out your salvation in your goal setting, striving and keeping each day, you know your salvation is all God’s doing. Paul had put it this way earlier in this letter: *Therefore* (i.e. because Jesus is your Lord and Savior and has accomplished your salvation for you) . . . *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **for it is God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*** (cf. Philippians 2:12-13). God has set the goal of your life for you and is determined to

bring it to fruition in His presence eternally “in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. Amen” (cf. Nicene Creed).

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

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