

INTRODUCTION.

TODAY, ~ WE TAKE UP THE NEXT SECTION OF PHILIPPIANS, ~ A BRIEF ONE, ~ 3:12-16.

~~ In this section, ~ Paul talks about spiritual perfection.

▶▶ Apparently, ~ false teachers, ~ either those who were teaching false gospels or a different group of false teachers, ~ were teaching the doctrine of spiritual perfectionism.

▷▷ Spiritual perfectionism is, ~ I would suggest, ~ the belief that ~ in this life ~ a believer can reach full spiritual maturity, ~ a fully-formed Christ-like character, ~ and a state of sinlessness.

↪↪ In brief, ~ it's the doctrine that says spiritual perfection or, ~ put another way, ~ full Christ-likeness, ~ can be achieved in this life. ~~ . . . can be used interchangeably.

▶▶ Spiritual perfectionists want us to believe that they have already arrived spiritually.

▷▷ They would have us believe that they live above the struggles, ~ temptations, ~ and trials of this life. ~~ In fact, ~ they would claim they have none of these things.

↪↪ They are not open and transparent about their struggles and failures in their Christian life. ~~ Again, ~ they would deny having any.

→→ They're very reluctant to admit their failings, ~ and some might claim they don't sin anymore. ~~ And they want us to also believe in spiritual perfectionism as well.

BASICALLY, ~ THE MAIN THRUST OF PHIL. 3:12-16 IS THAT THE CONCEPT OF spiritual perfection is true. ~~ And through this, ~ we see that the doctrine of spiritual perfectionism is wrong.

▶▶ But the concept of spiritual perfection is true. ~~ I.e., ~ we will someday be fully Christ-like.

▶▶ However, ~ it does not happen automatically when we become believers, ~ and does not happen in this life, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ but we are to be continually moving forward toward spiritual perfection. ~~ Spiritual perfection is one of the reasons Jesus redeemed us.

→→ And it will be completed, ~ we will reach full Christ-likeness, ~ when we enter Jesus' presence, ~ either at death or when he returns. ¶¶ 1/9

OK, ~ LET'S DIG IN AND EXAMINE WHAT PAUL HAS TO SAY ABOUT this subject.

IN VS. 12a, ~ DECLARES THAT HE HAS NOT ALREADY REACHED spiritual perfection.

PAUL'S SALVATION EXPERIENCE HAD TAKEN PLACE ABOUT 30 YEARS BEFORE HE wrote to the church at Philippi. ~~ Three observations here.

▶▶1st, ~ This shows us that spiritual perfection does not happen automatically when we become a believer.

▶▶2nd, ~ That Paul had been a believer for 30 years and what Paul says here indicates, ~ I would suggest, ~ 77

▷▷that the process of spiritual perfection begins when we become a believer and continues throughout our lives.

▶▶The 3rd observation, ~ and will spend more time on this, ~ 3rd is this. ~~ Paul had been a believer for 30 years, ~ yet candidly confessed that he had not already reached perfection.

▷▷He implied that he still had much more room to grow spiritually. ~~ This is true of all believers.

▷▷This is illustrated in what Paul told the church in Thessalonica.

↪↪1 Thess. 4:1. ~~ LEB ~~ Finally therefore, brothers, we ask you and appeal to you in the Lord Jesus that, just as you have received from us how it is necessary for you to live and to please God, just as indeed you are living, that you progress even more.

→→Commends them, ~ but also points out that there's room for growth. ~~ They were doing wonderfully and had made great strides in their spiritual growth. ~~ But still had room to grow.

▷▷My . . . ~ no matter how spiritually mature we have become, ~ there is still plenty of room to grow.

↪↪No matter how far down the road to full Christ-likeness we've traveled, ~ there is a great distance yet to travel. ~~ We will never spiritually arrive in this life. ~~ The doctrine of spiritual perfectionism is wrong.

NOTICE WHAT PAUL SAYS IN VERSE 12b. ~~ BUT I PRESS ON TO MAKE IT MY own.

PAUL ACKNOWLEDGED IN VS. 12a THAT HE HAD NOT REACHED FULL CHRIST-likeness, ~~ but he says here in verse 12b that he presses on to possess that spiritual perfection. 77 2/9

▶▶ The verb Paul uses, ~ "I press on," ~ means "to move quickly, ~ energetically, ~ and decisively toward an objective, ~ to hasten, ~ to run, ~ to press forward, ~ to press on."

▷▷ So this was an active, ~ ongoing, ~ strenuous, ~ and targeted pursuit of full Christ-likeness on Paul's part.

↪↪ I think we can see the picture that Paul is painting for us. ~ Not some passive, ~ lazy approach to spiritual growth.

JUST A COUPLE OF REFLECTIONS HERE.

▶▶ 1st, ~ that Paul continually pressed on to reach spiritual perfection implies that we, ~ believers, ~ are to also be continually moving toward full Christ-likeness.

▷▷ This was actually already made explicit in 2:12. ~ Recall that Paul told us to continue working out our salvation, ~ referring to our sanctification.

↪↪ When think about, ~ sanctification is basically what's also in view here in 3:12-16.

↪↪ As we noted when we looked at 2:12, ~ Paul was exhorting us to keep on growing more and more like Jesus. ~ Each day we should be becoming more and more like our Savior.

▷▷ So implicitly and explicitly, ~ we see that we, ~ believers, ~ are to be continually moving toward spiritual perfection.

↪↪ Just because we won't reach full Christ-likeness in this life, ~ it does not mean we don't have to be moving toward it.

▶▶ The 2nd reflection on verse 12b. ~ Paul's active, ~ continual, ~ and strenuous pursuit of full Christ-likeness holds him up as an example for us to emulate.

▷▷ We should have the same active engagement in becoming more and more like Jesus.

▷▷ Not: study once in awhile, ~ attend church & Bible studies sporadically, ~ pray, ~ read.

▷▷ Following Paul's lead, ~ my . . . , ~ We too are to actively, ~ persistently, ~ and with great effort ~ press on toward full spiritual perfection.

↪↪ We too are not to adopt a passive, ~ lazy approach to spiritual growth.

▷▷ Recall that the author of Hebrews, ~ we've mentioned this a few times, ~ the author of Hebrews rebuked his original readers for their spiritual stagnation. 📖 3/9

↳↳ They had become spiritually lazy and stopped trying to understand. ~~ They had been believers so long that they should have been teaching others.

→→ Instead, ~ they needed someone to teach them the basic things about God's word again. ~~ They were like babies who needed milk and could not eat solid food.

↳↳ He exhorted them to move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and move on to maturity.

▶▶ Loved ones, ~ let us commit or recommit ourselves to an active, ~ continual, ~ and strenuous pursuit of becoming more and more like Jesus, ~ of becoming fully Christ-like.

▷▷ And let us totally reject a passive, ~ lazy approach to spiritual growth.

▶▶ But what does an active, ~ continual, ~ and strenuous pursuit of becoming more and more like Jesus look like? ~~ Here are some suggestions.

▷▷ Daily Bible reading (a seldom used or dust-covered Bible . . .). ~~ Regular personal and group Bible study. ~~ An active prayer life. ~~ Allowing others to hold us accountable.

↳↳ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. ~~ IOW, ~ regular church attendance. ~~ *Listening to sound teaching and preaching. ~~ And applying and living out biblical truth in our lives.*

→→ These are just some of the ways to engage in an active, ~ continual, ~ and strenuous pursuit of becoming more and more like Jesus. ~~ *Perhaps you can think of others. ~~ Encourage you to do so this week.*

IN VERSE 12c, ~ PAUL INDICATES THAT US BECOMING FULLY CHRIST-LIKE WAS one of the reasons Jesus made us his own.

(LEB) FOR WHICH ALSO I WAS LAID HOLD OF BY CHRIST. ~~ I.E., ~ "BUT I PRESS ON to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus chose me."

▶▶ Jude alludes to this in his benediction at the end of his letter, ~ **verse 24**, ~ "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy."

▶▶ And in **Rom. 8:29a**, ~~ **For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.**

▷▷ I.e., ~ God knew his people in advance, ~ and he chose them to become like his Son.

▷▷Clearly points out perfection was 1 of the reasons for which Jesus redeemed us.

↳↳I believe it also points out that the perfection process begins at the moment of our salvation and that the process continues throughout our lives.

▶▶This tells us that we definitely are to be moving toward spiritual perfection, ~ since this is one of the reasons Jesus redeemed us for.

IN VS. 13, ~ PAUL BASICALLY REPEATS HIMSELF ~ (MOST LIKELY FOR EMPHASIS ~ doesn't want us to miss this) ~ and adds a new detail.

BROTHERS, ~ I DO NOT CONSIDER THAT I HAVE MADE IT MY OWN. ~~ ¶¶

▶▶But one thing I do: ~~ (new detail ☞) ~ forgetting what lies behind (again, ~ that's the new) ~ and straining forward to what lies ahead.

▶▶"Brothers and sisters," ~ Paul says, ~ "I have not achieved perfection. ~~ I still have a long way to go. ~~ ¶¶

▷▷But I focus on this one thing: ~~ forgetting what lies behind ~ and straining forward to the spiritual perfection that lies ahead."

NOW, ~ PAUL DOES NOT TELL US WHAT HE MEANS BY "WHAT LIES BEHIND."

▶▶He leaves it wide open. ~~ But I do think we can take a stab at what he's talking about. ~~ Probably, ~ Paul has two things in mind.

▶▶1st, ~ no doubt he's referring to his previous life, ~ i.e., ~ before Christ.

▷▷And this is exactly what Paul calls believers to do, ~ isn't it, ~ to leave our old life behind?

↳↳In Col. he tells us to "seek the things that are above, ~ where Christ is," ~ to set our "minds on things that are above, ~ not on things that are on earth," ~~ And to "put to death what is earthly in" us. (Col. 3)

▷▷And Peter, ~ referring to our unsaved lifestyle, ~ says that we have spent enough time in the past doing what unbelievers choose to do. ~~ Then lists some examples of ungodly behavior.

▷▷Our unsaved lifestyle has no place in our new life in Christ, ~ and will certainly not promote growth in Christ-likeness. ¶¶ 5/9

▶▶2nd, ~ "what lies behind" could very well refer also to Paul's life up to this point as a believer, ~ i.e., ~ what he's accomplished so far in becoming fully Christ-like.

▷▷IOW, ~ he doesn't rest on his laurels. ~~ He doesn't puff himself up and say, ~ "my how wonderful I am. ~~ Just look how mature I am."

▷▷No. ~~ Rather, ~ his attitude is one that says, ~ "I have come a long way, ~ but am not perfect yet, ~ I have a long way to go, ~ therefore I press on."

▷▷I think this is a very good lesson for us to learn and to apply to our lives, ~ don't you?

SO PAUL LEAVES BEHIND HIS PAST LIFE ~ AND HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS SO FAR, ~ and strains forward ~ to the perfection that lies ahead.

▶▶The Greek phrase for "straining forward" means "to exert oneself to the uttermost, ~ stretch out, ~ strain."

▷▷Paul resolved to exert himself to the uttermost, ~ to stretch out, ~ to strain to become more and more like Jesus.

▷▷Again, ~ no passive, ~ lazy attitude toward spiritual growth here. ~~ Paul sets the bar quite high for us in our pursuit of growing to full Christ-likeness.

▶▶And lest we think that we can't be like Paul, ~ keep in mind that it was God the Holy Spirit who empowered Paul to strain forward.

▷▷Remember that immeasurable power available to us that we talked about in [verse 10 of chapter 3](#)?

▷▷As noted, ~ God's infinite, ~ matchless power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to believers as we seek to live a life that is glorifying and pleasing to him.

↳↳When we resolve to exert ourselves to the uttermost, ~ to stretch out, ~ to strain to become more and more like Jesus, ~ 77

→→the Holy Spirit will fill us with this immeasurable power that will enable us to do so.

IN VERSE 14, ~ PAUL SHOWS US WHEN WE WILL REACH SPIRITUAL PERFECTION.

I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL FOR THE PRIZE OF THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN Christ Jesus. 77 6/9

▶▶ Simply put, ~ because we want to get to Paul's point, ~ "the goal" is when we enter into Jesus' presence, ~ either at death or when he returns. ~~ "the prize" is perfection.

▷▷ "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" is the believer's initial call to faith, ~ i.e., ~ the moment we came to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

↪↪ And he's saying that "the prize" comes from or results from, ~ that's what "of" means, ~ "the prize" comes or results from knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord.

▶▶ Ok, ~ here's Paul's point. ~~ And it should make what I just said much clearer.

▷▷ "I press on energetically toward the goal of entering Jesus' presence ~ for the purpose of receiving the perfection ~ that results from my knowing Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord."

▶▶ So we see that spiritual perfection will not be reached in this life. ~~ It will finally be reached when we enter into Jesus' presence.

▶▶ And think about this. ~~ God does not expect us to reach spiritual perfection in this life. ~~ But he does expect us to be growing toward it in this life.

IN VERSE 15, ~ PAUL FOLLOWS ALL OF THIS UP WITH AN EXHORTATION. TO believers.

LET THOSE OF US WHO ARE MATURE THINK THIS WAY, ~ AND IF IN ANYTHING YOU think otherwise, ~ God will reveal that also to you.

▶▶ Unfortunately, ~ some translations use the word "perfect," ~ This makes it confusing. ~~ Like Paul contradicting himself: ~~ can't be perfect. ~~ those who are perfect.

▷▷ The word means spiritually mature here, ~ and should be translated "mature," as ESV has it, ~ or paraphrased as "spiritually mature."

IN VERSE 15, ~ PAUL CALLS UPON ALL OF US, ~ WHO ARE WELL ALONG IN OUR spiritual growth, ~ to adopt this view on spiritual perfection that he has just gone over.

▶▶ And he also let's us know that if we adopt a wrong view of spiritual perfection, ~ that's what's implied here, ~ that the Lord will let us know that we are wrong in our thinking.

THAT'S A VERY INTERESTING STATEMENT, ~ ISN'T IT? ~~ PAUL DOESN'T SAY HOW, ~ just that the Lord will let us know.

THIS TELLS US AT LEAST THREE THINGS. ↯↯ 7/9

▶▶1st, ~ the Lord definitely wants us to take the correct view in this matter of spiritual perfection.

▷▷We are not perfect yet, ~ and won't be in this lifetime, ~ Jesus called us to be perfect, ~ we are to continually be moving toward full Christ-likeness, ~ ¶¶

↪↪and we will be made perfect when we cross the finish line.

▷▷That believers will be fully Christ-like in the future is a promise from the Lord.

▷▷Therefore, ~ Spiritual perfectionism, ~ the belief that spiritual perfection can happen in this life, ~ is wrong, ~ but not only wrong, ~ it's also impossible.

▷▷And Paul wants us to be in agreement with this and live accordingly.

▶▶2nd, ~ the fact that Paul doesn't say how God will make it plain to us if we disagree on some point about spiritual perfection implies that God can and will use various means to do so.

▷▷Through his word, ~ another person, ~ or prayer. ~~ A thought may pop into our minds. ~~ It might come as a nagging in our minds that something's not right.

↪↪The point is, ~ the Lord has countless ways to do it, ~ but he will definitely let us know if we are not thinking and acting correctly about spiritual perfection.

▶▶And the 3rd thing [verse 15](#) tells us is this. ~~ The Lord is personally involved in our lives. ~~ He cares about us and wants what's best for us.

▷▷For us and not against us. ~~ And that's good news. ~~ And what's best for us is to hold the correct view of spiritual perfection.

PAUL CONCLUDES THIS SECTION IN VERSE 16. ~~ VERY BRIEFLY NOW.

LEB: ONLY TO WHAT WE HAVE ATTAINED, ~ TO THE SAME HOLD ON. ~~ *Literal translation to help us see what's going on here.*

▶▶Ok, ~ what have we attained, ~ or gained? ~~ Well, ~ the immediate context deals with the correct teaching on spiritual perfection.

▷▷Remember, ~ Paul was refuting the false teaching of spiritual perfectionism. ~~ Well, ~ now, ~ thanks to Paul, ~ we have gained the correct teaching on spiritual perfection.

▶▶And here's Paul's point. ~~ "Now that you, ~ believers, ~ have gained this correct teaching on spiritual perfection, ~ hold on to it. ~~ Don't let it go. ~~ Don't abandon it." ¶¶ 8/9

CONCLUSION.

HOLD ON TO THE CORRECT TEACHING ABOUT SPIRITUAL PERFECTION. ~~ DON'T LET it go. ~~ Don't abandon it.

▶▶ Well, ~ I think that's a very good note to end on.

LET'S PRAY 9/9

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