

The Gospel According to Philippians
Gospel Aspiration
Philippians 3:8 – 4:1
Sermon Outline

Introduction: Paul calls us to imitate him in his striving after Christ: v. 12: *Not that I have obtained this...but I press on to make it my own.* v. 17: *Brothers, join in imitating me...*

I) Paul is zealous to press on and therefore so should we be

v. 13: *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...*

A) Not there yet

The spiritual benefit of Christians who stop pretending they have arrived

B) Straining forward

Olympic running

A determined trek – v. 14 walk according to the example you have in us

Diagnostic questions:

Perfectionism?

II) Gospel striving versus perfectionism: What does it look like?

A) Full of joy

4:1: *My brothers...my joy and crown...*

B) Full of love

Longing

Weeping: v. 18...*of whom I now tell you with tears*

III) Why the difference?

A) It builds upon a foundation of grace

v. 12:...*because Christ has made me his own*

Diagnostic questions:

- Worry or joy?
- Results or faithfulness?

B) It pursues a worthy and large enough goal

v.14: *the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*

v. 12: *not that I have already obtained this or have already been made perfect*

- Meaning of *this* (v 12)
- Meaning of *been made perfect*
 - Passive
 - “Completed, made whole, according to purpose”

C) It builds upon a certain hope

vv.20-21: Our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, who will transform our lowly body...by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself

Striving as waiting

Hope is real and concrete

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) How honest are your Christian fellowship experiences? Have you ever been in a situation where a person's genuineness about struggle opened a group up and enabled that group to go deeper? What can you do to increase the level of honesty in the Christian fellowship you are presently part of?
- 2) In his commentary on Philippians Alec Motyer tells us that Paul is using the language of Olympic running in *v. 13*: "Here is the runner in the games 'extended in every fiber of his being—the eye outstrips and draws on the hand, and the hand the foot—everything is at a stretch to breast the tape.'" Are you as eager to know Christ as you are to get through the day with the children or to succeed with your projects at school or work? If the answer is no, what are the causes for your spiritual lethargy?
- 3) Paul's gospel striving "shows up" in joy and love (see 4:1 and his tears in 3:18). Compare these effects to the effects of perfectionism. Why the difference?
- 4) According to Paul the foundation of gospel striving is the grace of God (*vs. 12*: I press on to make it my own because Christ has made me his own"). Read Romans 5:6-9. How does Paul's argument there help us to keep trekking forward towards Christ despite the discouragements and difficulties we encounter in ourselves and our circumstances?
- 5) The perfectionist strives in order to justify his existence. The "gospel striver" strives because Christ has already justified his existence and has already seen to his acceptance into the world and the family that matter the most. The perfectionist will say "yes" to the following questions: (1) Do I worry as I work or do I work simply and joyfully? (2) Do the results of my work preoccupy me or do I find contentment simply in having been faithful in my work, regardless of the results? Grade yourself on your answers.
- 6) Reflect on the following: "Human perfectionism narrows our lives down. It is about me being happy and fulfilled now, according to my definition of "happy and fulfilled" and accomplished by my efforts to control that happiness and fulfillment. God's "perfectionism" (Paul speaks of being made perfect in Phil 3:12) opens life up. It is a work of God's love and power by which he puts us into his big story of cosmic renewal and makes us participants in it. It transforms us from narcissistic narrowly focused 'happiness mongers' into joyous, purpose-driven lovers of God and people. It delivers us from the bondage of laboring over self-esteem into the freedom of esteeming others and God."
- 7) One of the many great ironies of living the Christian life is that our "striving" can be described as "waiting". This is what Paul says in Phil. 3:20-21. What are we waiting for? How does this help us to continue steadfastly in our pursuit of Christ and in our love for people?

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