

**Please turn in your copies of God's Word to Philippians chapter 3. Here in our text this morning we come to what is really the beginning of the end of Paul's rebuttal against the false teachers in Philippi. This portion begins what could rightly be called the application of his rebuttal, and we will see this application continue next time as we conclude chapter 3. With this in mind, hear now the Word of our Lord from Philippians chapter 3 beginning at verse 12.**

**\*Read Philippians 3:12-16\***

**\*Pray\***

**I'm not sure if it was this way when you were growing up, but when I was a child in middle school every student had to run one mile. I'm not quite sure the reasoning behind this; most likely it was some sort of government mandate. No one looked forward to this dreaded day in PE. Some students feigned sick hoping that they would not have to do the run, only for them to have to do a make-up run at a later date. I was not the most athletic kid growing up. I was one of those who hated the thought of having to run, and the day of the one mile run was a day I wished would never come. But that day did come. We all lined up on the football field track and began the longest mile of our lives. Curious enough running would become a standard thing in my life later on in adulthood. I joined the army where the standard run for our physical fitness test was two miles long. We also would go on what they called "fun runs" periodically which would be five mile runs in formation. Eventually I learned the trick to running. You have to keep an even pace, not slowing down too much, not exerting too much energy too early. Eventually, on that last lap, the finish line would be in sight. It was then that you dug your heels in, you reached deep down inside yourself and found whatever remaining energy was left, and you sprinted with all of your might. You've probably seen Olympic runners do this. The finish line is just ahead, and they exert every bit of energy, even leaning forward, reaching forth, towards the finish line knowing the prize which lies ahead. This is the mental image that the Apostle Paul is putting in the minds of the saints at Philippi. This seems to**

be a favorite illustration of Paul concerning the Christian life, that it is a race which we are to run. He says in Hebrews 12:1, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” So the exhortation to you this morning is to run the race set before you, reaching forth towards that heavenly prize. We will consider this exhortation under three heads: first, our mission; next, our motivation; and lastly, our mindset.

Let us first consider our mission. What is it that we are called to do in this race known as the Christian life? Look with me at verse 12, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” To understand what our mission is we have to remember what Paul said in the previous section. He had said that he aimed and eagerly aspired at the resurrection of the dead through fellowship in the Cross of Christ. He adds, that he has not as yet arrived at this. At what? At the attainment of having entire fellowship in Christ’s sufferings, having a full taste of the power of his resurrection, and knowing him perfectly. The mission is the perfect attainment of these things, something which Paul understands but he continually strived for. It’s likely that he is correcting some false teaching in his statement regarding the ability to attain perfection. It’s likely that the false teachers in Philippi added a notion of perfectionism to their Judaizing heresy, and Paul is seeking to put that false teaching to rest. We today have some that espouse this teaching as well, though not many of us may be familiar with it. The Wesleyan brand of the Methodist Church holds to a doctrine of sinless perfectionism, that there comes a point in this life that a believer can be perfect. Paul says this isn’t the case, but that it is something which is apprehended when one attains glorification in eternity. While the work of Christ for us is perfect, and it were presumption to think of adding to it, the work of the Holy Spirit in us is not perfect, it is continually carried on from day to day, and will need to be continued throughout the

**whole of our lives. We are being “conformed to the image of Christ,” and that process is in operation, as we advance towards glory.**

**Note also that this mission can only be completed by those who are in Christ, by those who have been apprehended of Him. Here again Paul refutes the notion that there is anything you can do which contributes to your laying claim to the heavenly prize. It is not our laying hold of Christ first, but his laying hold of us, which is our happiness and salvation. Matthew Henry says, “When Christ laid hold of us, it was to bring us to heaven; and to apprehend that for which he apprehended us is to attain the perfection of our bliss.” Paul is reminding these believers, even here in this application portion, that unless ones confidence is in Christ alone then there will be no knowing Him “and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” There will be no attaining unto the resurrection of the dead or reaching that prize of glory. Those things are only found in Christ. Nothing else can bring someone unto a state of perfection but being found in Christ Jesus. It is not your covenant faithfulness, it is not faith accompanied by works, it is not keeping of the ceremonial law, it is not any of those things which Paul spoke of as but vanity; it is in Christ alone that one attains to perfection of those things hoped for in eternity.**

**This is our mission set before us. If any one of you were to compare yourself with the perfect law of God, or with the spotless example of the Lord, will you not find in yourself any number of deficiencies? Even compare yourself with Paul, a man of like passions with yourselves, and will you not appear a dwarf, a very child in comparison of him? Examine yourselves with respect to every Christian grace, and see whether you do not fall very short of that bright pattern. We must all confess, that “we have not yet apprehended that for which we have been apprehended of Christ Jesus.” Do you understand that apprehending that which you have been apprehended of Christ Jesus is your mission in this life? Do you see the attainment of that heavenly prize, being captivated by**

**the excellencies of the Lord, entering into eternal bliss and perfection as your primary mission; or do you view it as secondary compared to all the duties of this world? In the army we would receive our missions in a briefing. Hours were spent in those meetings to ensure that the mission was rightly understood in order for it to rightly be executed. Friends, you must understand the mission in order to fulfill it. All of the duties of this world, your work or your family or your relationships or your service to the Church, ought to be done with the intention of it furthering your advancement in this primary mission of attaining perfection. If they are not then you must reconsider them, you must be willing to part with them, you must reorient their place of priority in your life.**

**But understanding the mission does not necessarily mean you are running the race with that as your focus. The information can be there, but if your heart is far off then you are no better than a dog chasing his own tail. This leads us now to consider our motivation. Look with me at verses 13 and 14, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Paul says he is going to keep facing forward. He is going to fix his eyes on the finishing line of heavenly glory; and he is going to stretch every ligament and strain every muscle in his effort to complete his race. He reminds these saints that the attainment of the prize ought to be the motivating factor in running this race. What is the prize that is in mind? It is none other than Christ Jesus Himself and the full and perfect attainment of Him and all the spiritual blessing which accompany being united to Him. This full attainment does not take place here in this life, but is the reward for diligently running the race and reaching the finish line. In Revelation 22:13-14 we see this prize freely given, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” Charles Spurgeon writes, “It is clear that a man cannot be a runner who**

**merely holds his ground, contented with his position: he only runs aright who each moment nears the mark. Progress is the healthy condition of every Christian man; and he only realises his best estate while he is growing in grace, 'adding to his faith virtue,' 'following on to know the Lord,' and daily receiving grace for grace out of the fulness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus."**

**So this must every be at the forefront of your minds. Paul says this must be the motivating factor, what drives believers ahead, what empowers them by the Holy Spirit to run this race with patience. But Paul also recognizes that we are weak, that we have a tendency to not keep our eyes forward on the finish line. So he says believers are to run this race "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." Paul does not mean that he forgot the mercy of God which he had enjoyed; far from it. Paul does not mean that he forgot the sins which he had committed; far from it, he would always remember them to humble him. There is a sinful forgetting of past sins and past mercies, which ought to be remembered for the exercise of constant repentance and thankfulness to God. Paul was a great sinner, he had done terrible things against Christ and His Bride, but he did not focus on those things. He did not wallow in self-pity or continuously look back to those things causing him to lose sight of what lied ahead. Instead Paul forgot the things which were behind so as not to be content with present measures of grace: he was still for having more and more. He did not look back to his pedigree or to his own self-righteousness or to his zeal or to anything else as a motivating factor in running this race. If he had then they would have been cause for stumbling. Instead he kept his eyes fixed on Christ and the glory that awaited him, knowing that the finish line would soon come, and he would receive the fullness and perfect of those things which he longed for.**

**What of you? Do you look to the things behind you, losing focus on Christ and the prize set before you? Do you long to go back to your old sinful ways, like a dog returning to its vomit? Brothers**

**and sisters, you must see how deadly to do so is. That is precisely what Paul is warning the Church against in Hebrews 6, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.” Disaster strikes when you run a race while looking back. The old self-reliant, “I can do it,” pull-yourself-up-by-the-boot-straps approach to the Christian life is deadly, and Paul is calling us, yes to do our duty, but to beware of relying on or performance as we do it. To live in the past is to hide from the reality of the present and the challenges of the future. Those who are mature in Christ will be characterized by a whole-hearted pursuit of fellowship with him which looks to the future. Hear the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.” Friends this must be your motivation, that incorruptible crown, that reward of perfect attainment.**

**Now that the mission is rightly understood and the motivation is rightly embraced, we must now turn our attention to focus on our mindset which we must have when running this race. Look with me at verses 15 and 16, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” So what is this mindset that you must have in running this race? Paul says you must be single-minded. You cannot have your mind captivated by a hundred different things and expect to be able to remain focused on the mission which stands before you. The Philippian believers could not have their minds captured by the false teachers which were making in-roads into the Church; they could not have their minds captured by the lives which they had given up**

**for the sake of the Gospel; they could not have their minds captured by the persecution which was threatening them. No, they had to be single-minded in this pursuit, being focused only upon Christ, His commands, and the reward of glory. Do not be double-minded and unstable in all your ways as James says in chapter 1 verse 8. To be double-minded, to have your focus diverted in every direction is foolishness. An Olympic runner cannot be distracted by issues in the home or the crowd crying out against him or even the other runners in the race. His head must be clear, his focus must be singular, his eyes must be pointed ahead. So too must it be with believers running this race called the Christian life, for Satan would like nothing more than to see believers distracted from the things of God and focused on the things of the world.**

**So Paul gives the answer, the cure, for double-mindedness, and that is to remain focused upon the things which God shall reveal unto you. The key to running this race well is to be rooted and grounded in the things which Jehovah has revealed unto His people. Where is this found? In the Word of God alone. Seek out from the Scriptures the things which empower you and strengthen you and motivate you to run this race. Zeal for knowledge and doctrine will not justify you before the Father, but what it will do is encourage you and equip you to run this race with patience and endurance. But it's important to note that not everyone has the same level of understanding. Friends, you do not run the race of the Christian life alone. You have been given the Church, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, to run alongside of you, to encourage you, to aid you in this race. We must learn also from this passage, that we must bear for a time with ignorance in our weak brethren, and forgive them, if it is not given them immediately to be altogether of one mind with us. Sanctification is a process, and some are further along in that process than others. Knowledge of the Scripture and purity of life are gifts given by the Spirit of God through the process of sanctification. The words of Matthew Henry are wise to remember, "Whatever it is wherein you differ, you must wait till God give you a better understanding, which he will do in his due time. In the mean**

**time, as far as you have attained, you must go together in the ways of God, join together in all the great things in which you are agreed, and wait for further light in the minor things wherein you differ.”**

**So let me ask you, what is your mindset? Are you the double-minded fool who is unstable in all his ways, or are you single-minded in the pursuit of the attainment of that heavenly prize? Not only are you single-minded in your own personal life, but are you single-minded with those whom the Lord has called you to run this race? I have seen families torn apart because husband and wife are not single-minded in their pursuit after the things of the Lord. I have seen Churches crumble and dissolve because elders and members are not single-minded in running this race together. I would venture to say that no one in here is 100% in agreement with anyone else in all things, and yet we can still be single-minded in accomplishing our mission. Do not let the small differences be what causes a rift among this body. Do not let the small things drive a wedge between you and your wife or you and another member of this congregation. Over and over again Paul has exhorted us to be likeminded, to have this mind in us which is also in Christ Jesus, to be single-minded. Let us walk by the same rule, that ultimate rule of the Scriptures, the only infallible rule for faith and life, and run this race which is set before us. Do not be distracted by the things of this world, but let your mind be captivated by the prize which lies ahead. This must be our mindset.**

**Some of you perhaps are faint, and ready almost to give up running the race. But behold the prize: will not that repay? And is not the attainment of it certain, if you hold on your way? Will your strength not be renewed, if only you wait upon your God? You are almost there; you have almost made it to the finish line. In a few more steps you will reach the goal: will you stop when the prize is already, as it were, in your hands? O press forward follow the Apostle: endure to the end; and receive “the crown of glory that fadeth not away.” Brothers and sisters, run the race set before you, reaching forth towards that heavenly prize.**