

Phil.3:12-15

As we look to the New Year I would like to speak on: Pressing Toward the Mark in 2010. May our Great God grace us to have an intense yearning and striving for spiritual growth in year 2010! Here in these verses I believe that we see Paul expressing himself symbolically in a foot race, which clearly typifies his true heart's desire of having an intense yearning to press toward that precious prize that awaits him at the end of his spiritual race. Let us who name the name of Christ this morning join Paul in this spiritual race in running towards that cherished and treasured prize. There are five things that I would like to set forth before you this morning:

- I. Paul's Confession**
- II. Paul's Conviction**
- III. Paul's Contemplation**
- IV. Paul's Compensation**
- V. Paul's Consummation**

First, let look at: **I. Paul's Confession:** verse 12, *"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect..."* Here we see Paul's humility and honesty as he confesses his inability or attaining perfection. We have a bad habit of putting people on pedestals and I'm sure many of us read the writings of Paul and say, man he has arrive, he must have been perfect and that he had it altogether, I mean, if anyone could boast, surely, it was Paul. But, here, Paul shows us that he was human like all of us, that his feet were also made of clay. Paul confesses that he had NOT attained and that he was NOT perfect. What honesty, what humility, when Paul looked to himself, he saw his many imperfections, his many failures, his many inconsistencies. Not that Paul was not spiritual giant, but Paul understood that wherever he was, it was not by anything in himself but because of the grace of God. I Cor.:15: 9 & 10, *"For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But **by the grace of God I am what I am:** and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."* Paul knew that if he had anything to boast in or boast about, that it would be boasting about his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Psalms 34:2, *"My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad."* Psalms 44:8, *"In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah."* 2 Corinthians 10:13, *"But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you."* So as Paul writes in Philippians 3, we see that he acknowledges that he had not arrived, but again saw himself in a state of imperfection. What shall we say about his words in Romans

7:14-25, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. 16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. 17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. 19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. 20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. 21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. 22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 25 **I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.** So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Paul confesses his struggles with sin, his weaknesses, but nonetheless knowing that the victory is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul again tells us, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect..." As Paul begins to write about running the Christian race; that is, run to win, run to attain he makes sure that we know that he himself had not arrived or attained perfection. The best of the best of Christian's had not attained perfection. Paul was seeking to walk a high ambition of holiness, but he reminds us that he had not attained. Paul was in the midst of running the race but he has not finished when he penned these words. But he was running it with all his might. The Greek word for attained is "**lambano**," which means to obtain in the sense to lay hold of something and to receive something that is given. It is used in Matthew 7:7 & 8, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: 8 For every one that asketh **receiveth**; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Again in Phil.3:12, "Not as though I had already attained..." Not as though I had already received or obtained. Could he be speaking of a future glorified body? The word perfect in the Greek is, "**teleioo**." (te-la-i-o) It means to make perfect or complete. From the Precept Austin webpage, "**Teleioo** signifies the attainment of consummate soundness and includes the idea of being made whole. Interestingly the Gnostics used **teleios** of one fully initiated into their mysteries and that may have been why Paul used teleios in this epistle."

In Hebrews 12:2 it says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." This same word is used here as a noun (**teleiotes**) speaking of Jesus Christ being the finisher or completer of our faith. Jesus is the perfecter, the one who has reached the prize for us, yea; He has hit the mark for us to put us in the race. The word also gives the idea of seeking to reach maturity in order to have sound judgment to enhance our Christian character. From the Precept Austin webpage, "To summarize; the meaning of the adjective includes the ideas of full-growth, maturity, workability, soundness, and completeness. The verb refers to the act of bringing the person or thing to any one of the aforementioned conditions. When applied to a Christian, the word refers to one that is spiritually mature, complete, well-rounded in his Christian character."

Thus, Paul instructs us to get into the race but also encourages us by reminding us that he had not attained nor had obtained perfection, but running hard to obtain the

precious prize. The Precept Austin Webpage again says something interesting, "*That which Paul says he has **not yet appropriated** (KJV: "...either were already perfect) in an absolute sense, he mentions in Philippians 3:10. He has come to experience in some degree at least, the power of God surging through his being. He has entered into a joint-participation with Christ in suffering for righteousness' sake. The stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19, 20, 21, 22) is an example of that. He has been brought to the place in his experience where he radiates to some degree the self-lessness, the self-abnegation of the Lord Jesus. **But he has not appropriated these, laid hold upon these, in the fullest measure. There is room for much improvement and advance in these respects.**" (Wuest, K. S. *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: Eerdmans or Logos*) (Bolding and references added)."*

So Paul is saying dear Christian, get into the race, I'm running it, even though I have not obtain nor am I perfect, but I am running the race. Turn to 1 Cor.9:24-26. (vs 24, "that ye" vs 25, "but we.") Back to Phil. 3 and in verse 15, "Let us." 2 Tim.4:7 & 8, "**I have** fought a good fight, **I have** finished my course, **I have** kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up **for me** a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, **shall give me** at that day: and **not to me only**, but **unto all them** also that love his appearing." Yes, Paul is encouraging us to run the race, to continue, to persevere because of that prize that is at the end of the race. But he also confessed that though he also was in the race he had not obtained and nor was he perfect, but he was running. How about you this morning are you running the race? Or perhaps you are just going through the motions. Or maybe I should ask, are you interested in running the race? Are you willing to run the race? Notice secondly Paul attitude in running the race.

## II. Paul's Conviction.

Phil.3:12 & 13, "...but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13 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." Here we see Paul's conviction, he says clearly and loudly, BUT I FOLLOW AFTER! Here we see Paul's desire and dedication to run the race, his competitiveness to run, but to run and WIN! Like in sports, you play to win, not just to play and go through the motions, but to win. Every time I coach I ask the players, is your heart like my heart? Are we on the same page, I don't want to spend all my time in practice and preparing for the game if the players do not want to win. No, not just play the game, play and do what is necessary to WIN! If my players don't have this attitude, then I don't want to coach them. Not that we are going to win every game, but I want to know that your heart is in the game, if it is not, then we are wasting our time and therefore lets just be spectators. If I have this attitude in sports how much more in things pertaining to the kingdom of God! I want to run the race, but I want to run to win, thus to FOLLOW HARD AFTER CHRIST! I can't stand lip service players, much less lip service Christians! You know the ones that talk, talk and talk, but they do not walk, walk and WALK! This was not Paul, he might say, I have not

attained, I am not perfect, but this thing I do, I am resolved to follow after! This is conviction seasoned with character and commitment, I FOLLOW AFTER! The word follow in the Greek is "**dioko**." It means to pursue, to put up a fight, to seek after eagerly. It is the same word as press in verse 14 (read). I follow after, I press after the mark, I pursue after the mark with every ounce of strength in me. It gives the idea of running swiftly and quickly in order to catch a person or something, to run after something hard in order to reach the goal, to run with a vigorous activity. No matter how overwhelm we get with trials and problems; we must press with passionate action towards that mark. You cannot use trials and circumstances as excuses to not run or eliminate yourself from the race; no you must continue and press for that mark. We need to have the same conviction as Paul, in spite of all my imperfections and shortcoming, I'm will follow after, I will pursue with vigor the mark, I'm running hard. Even though this body of sin weights me down, I will press after the mark of the prize of that high calling. 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.*" We need to run the race with patience, that is, even though, we struggle with sin, or battle with trials or clash with the world we must have this conviction to run and pursue hard after Christ.

Paul continues by saying, "*...if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended..*" The words apprehend and apprehended are very interesting; it's the Greek its "**katalambano**." It means to lay hold of, to possess, to grasp completely and firmly, to seize and to take over. That is, I will follow after and lay hold of the mark and prize, because, Christ holds on to me. As we run the race and follow after the prize, Christ has already laid hold of us, thus we seek to hold on to him. It's like love, we love Him, because He first loved us, we seek to lay hold of Him because He laid hold of us first. It not so much that we hold on to Him, but that He has a HOLD on us! Reminds me of Psalm 73:23, "*Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.*" Not that we hold on to Him, but His laying hold of us first. Amen! This is why Paul says I follow after...that I may apprehend, that is, it is because, I am apprehended of Christ. Paul is saying, it was Christ who had a firmed hand holding onto me, thus, I follow hard after Him. Paul is in hot pursue of Christ and he seeks to apprehend that glorious prize, because Christ had first apprehended him. Let us endeavor to apprehend Christ, because He first apprehended and subdued us. Again, Paul says, "*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do..*" Here again we see the language of conviction, I mean I know that I have not apprehended, but I give my self over to do this one thing, I push myself to apprehend. Paul exerts himself like a runner in a race wherein he practices concentration on one object only. (Psalms 27:4) He permits nothing that will lead him off course, he runs as to run uninterrupted!

Notice the extent of his conviction, Paul continues by saying, "...but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." In other words the runner is never to look behind him, but always looking ahead of him reaching forth to that which is before him. Why doesn't he look back? Well, because he knows he will lose speed, he will lose his direction he might even trip and fall and be disqualified from the race. Looking back while running is very dangerous and so it is spiritually. We are not to look back, but forward. Amazing how many Christians live in the past. They cannot forget the pass, they cannot forget the things that happened in the past and it affects them in not being able to look forward. Sad that some cannot only forget the pass, but they cannot forgive what has happened in the past. Thus, they are presently miserable because of something that happened in the past. No, we must be as Paul and forget those things which are behind and look and reach forth to those things that are before us. This is part of his conviction also. He willingly put away the pass in order to run in the present. You cannot run in the present if you are still living in the pass. Just let it go, don't you know that it hinders you spiritually and affects your walk with Christ? Our Lord Jesus Christ makes reference about not looking back. Turn to Luke 9:57-62. Though I know this is speaking of preachers, but I believe we can glean something spiritual for everyone. You cannot serve Christ with divided loyalties. You cannot look back and forward at the same time. Christ also told us in Matthew 6:24, "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" We cannot have a divided heart in serving God. Then you have those who only want the ease and joy and not wanting to deal with troubles and difficulties. Those who look back are on shaky ground. Reminds me of Lot's wife, "*But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.*" Gen.19:26. Looking back has its effects; this is why Paul is so adamant in not looking back, not looking behind, but only looking forward to that blessed prize that awaits us. Paul will not allow anything to lead him off course, he will not look behind but to that what is before him.

Then you have the essence of spiritual goals that we made for 2009 and 2009 is already gone. Perhaps last year at this time you made some sort resolution, some promise, some vow to do things for Christ. Perhaps it was to read the whole Bible in a year. Maybe it was to pray more. Maybe it was to witness more. Perhaps it was that you wanted to be shining light for Christ. Maybe you made some spiritual goals for 2009 and for some reasons it did not happen. But now, 2009 is gone, you must put it behind you. Don't live in guilt or regrets. Seek in 2010 to accomplish those goals. Put those things behind you and reassert and reassess to make new spiritual goals and seek the grace of God to fulfill them, but don't mull over the pass, it is gone and we can never bring it back. You have an opportunity to do in 2010 what you didn't accomplish in 2009. Perhaps, it was blessings and great times of joy. I'm not saying to forget what God has done for you, but on the other side, don't hold on

to it without progress, you can't sit on it. Don't just hold on to it, but build upon it. Some hold on to a blessing and are living in the past. Maybe God blessed tremendously, His goodness was great, His grace was sufficient, His blessings unmatched, but you need fresh grace, you need fresh mercy and you need fresh blessings, its 2010 and what we need are fresh things from God. I don't want to live in a blessing He gave me a year ago or 5 years ago or 10 years ago. I'm thankful and grateful and exited, but I need the freshness of God for 2010. Don't live in that blessing or grace He gave you in the past, look forward with faith and expectation that if He blessed you in the past, He can bless you again and again and again. That's faith and trust, that's expectation. That's part of Ps.81:10, "*...open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.*" It's like the manna; they had to get it fresh everyday, except when they got it on the sixth day, double, for the Sabbath. What I am saying brethren, is this, forget your shortcomings, forget sin in the past, put them behind you and press forward the mark. Put away the things of 2009 and look forward to 2010. Do not misunderstand me, don't forget totally what God has done for you in 2009, how can you forget the mercy of God, but don't live in them either, but by faith build upon them and with great expectation look to God to bless in 2010. Paul put away those things in past and reach forth toward that prize. "*...but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.*" The phrase reaching forth is the Greek word "**epekteinomai.**" (ep-ek-ta-no-mi) It basically means stretching forth, to extend and stretch out in the sense to overextend oneself. It pictures the runner straining every nerve, every muscle as he keeps running with all his might for that goal. A runner in a close race throws himself forward or overextends his neck to win the race. He stretches forward with all his might so as to win. The present tense describes this stretching forward, this reaching forward as a habitual practice, which should also be our lifelong attitude. Running the race to win, exerting everything in our spiritual fiber necessary to win that prize. Don't look back 2009, but stretch forward with spiritual conviction to reach that goal in 2010.

Set forth some goals for 2010: Meditate upon what our Lord has done for us. Saving us, taking our sins, forgiving us, giving us His Holy Spirit, making us holy, sanctifying us, loving us, protecting us, caring for us, blessing us and many other blessed spiritual blessing He has bestowed upon us. Psalms 68:19, "*Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.*" Let's give ourselves to Him 2010 to use us for His honor and glory. If we name the name of Christ, let us then be willing to: "***be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.***" Let us be willing to sacrifice anything and everything to honor and glorify our Great God!

- Let us seek to have total commitment to Christ in 2010. Let us seek to walk in His ways, in His will. Let us put away self-ambition and self-seeking and give

ourselves to serve Him and Him alone. Have a Holy commitment of: Psalms 86:11, *"Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name."* Can you say that with me?

- Let us seek to have total consecration to Christ in 2010. Let us seek to walk in holiness before Him 2010. He gave His life for us; let us give our lives for Him. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."* Romans 12:1 & 2. Notice it's not in your strength and power but in His mercies, which we seek to consecrate our lives to Him. 1 Chron. 29:5 says, *"...And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD?"* Can you say with me, I am willing to consecrate my service this day unto you LORD?
- Let us seek to have total conviction for Christ 2010. This is what I believe many Christians lack, conviction. Let us be a people of conviction in 2010. Take a stand for Christ and don't be ashamed of being a Christian. Let us have some passion and fervor for Christ. Psalms 73:25, *"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."* Can we say that, there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee? Seek to have communion with Him in 2010. Don't be ashamed of saying, "my heart belongs go HIM!" Serve with a passionate heart like Joshua and say, **"as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."** Can you say that?
- Let us seek to have total conformity to Christ in 2010. No, I don't want to be like Mike (Michael Jordon); I want to be like CHRIST! I want to be like my redeemer: loving, caring, compassionate, forgiving, tender, considerate and generous. I want to do what is says in the second Psalm and verse 12, *"Kiss the Son..."* I want to follow Him in 2010, I want to learn of Him in 2010, I want to serve Him in 2010 and I want to be Conform to Him in 2010! I want to Love Him with all my heart, with all my strength, with all my soul and with all my mind! What is that I hear? *"Oh it is the voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. 10 My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. 14 O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see*

thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. 16 My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies." (SOS 2) "8 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love. 10 My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. 11 His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. 12 His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. 13 His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. 14 His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. 15 His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. 16 His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." (SOS 5) Don't you want this close fellowship and communion with Christ in 2010? It's possible, but are we willing to do those things necessary to experience the preciousness of Christ?

If so, we must follow the words of the Apostle Paul: "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. 13 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." Let us reach forth in this New Year as never before. Let me ask again, are we willing in 2010 to "**be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work?**" And again: 1 Chron. 29:5 says, "...And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD?" Can you say with me, I am willing to consecrate my service this day unto you LORD?

John Newton said as he looked over his own life, and looked to where he was heading: "**I am not what I ought to be** — ah, how imperfect and deficient! **I am not what I wish to be** — I abhor what is evil, and I would cleave to what is good! **I am not what I hope to be** — soon, soon shall I put off mortality, and with mortality all sin and imperfection. Yet, though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, **I am not what I once was**; a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'" Newton knew what it meant to look forward, and to be willing to consecrate his life for Christ with a holy and firm conviction.

May our Great God grace us to do the same for the honor and glory of His NAME!

Amen and may you all have a spiritual prosperous Happy New Year!

**KEEP THE FIRE BURNING!**