



PHILIPPIANS

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...if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:11

Paul had just said “being conformed to His death” while speaking of Christ. Christ died in sinless perfection, and Paul desired to follow him, as closely as he could, in this sinless state. Rather than living for the world and in the flesh, his desire was to be molded to be like Christ in all ways. To show his great desire in this, he now states, “...if, by any means.” This is not a statement of doubt, but rather a statement of humility. He was willing to put aside all things in this world in order to humbly and obediently follow Christ in all ways.

From there he says, “I may.” Again, this is not a statement of doubt. It is a statement of surety in what lies ahead. The word *katantaó* means “to arrive at,” such as at a goal. The English gives an ambiguity which does not exist in the Greek. What he is looking to arrive at is to “attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Paul uses a word for “resurrection” not found elsewhere, *eksanástasis*. It means “rising up to experience *the full-impact* of resurrection, i.e. *thoroughly removed from the realm of death (the grave)*” (HELPS Word Studies). The goal of Paul was one which he had dedicated his life to. He was assured of its coming, and therefore, he desired to be responsible with the time he had now as he awaited that glorious moment. He knew he would die and lay among the dead, but he also knew that he would rise from among those dead, out of the grave and out of the dead.

For him, and for those who are in Christ, there would be a departure, leaving behind those dead who are not in Him. The particular term “from the dead” is found only here and in 1 Peter 1:3 as it applies to Christ Jesus. This is the resurrection unto life for those who are in

Christ Jesus. His resurrection is as a pledge that we too will follow Him. The sealing of the Holy Spirit is the mark of that pledge, placing us in Christ and thus guaranteeing what has been promised.

Life application: Paul was assured of his position in Christ, and he desired to live for Christ because of what that meant. How troubling it is that we often are confused as to whether our salvation is really true or not. Let God be true, but every man a liar. He has promised; He will perform. And how sad it is that even if we believe His promise, we don't live as if the promise is really ahead of us. Instead, we live for now. If the promise is ahead of us, then we really will meet up with it some wonderful day. Should we not be striving to emulate the Lord while we await its arrival?

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Philippians 3:12

The tenses of the verbs within the verse intentionally change with the progression of Paul's thought. Scholars struggle over and argue over the exact reading of what he is conveying, but despite the nuances, the overall picture here, and for the next couple verses, are those of the Greek races. There is a prize at the end of the finish line, and Paul describes the process from beginning to end concerning that goal. If that is kept in mind, then an overall understanding of his words is more easily grasped.

He has just spoken of the "resurrection from the dead," and now he introduces the thought of being "perfected." He has drawn the two together, as if they have the same overall meaning. This is seen also in Jesus' words of Luke 13 –

““And He said to them, “Go, tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third *day* I shall be perfected.’³³ Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the *day* following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.”” Luke 13:32, 33

Jesus ties His death in with being perfected. How can this be when He is the sinless Son of God? It is because He assumed the likeness of man. He came and dwelt in the mortal flesh of humanity. Until He died and was resurrected, He bore this form. However, in His resurrection the corruption of the earthly body was cast off and He was adorned in a heavenly body. He saw no corruption in His earthly body (Acts 2:27), but the body itself could have corrupted if it was found with sin. It was not, and He never saw the corruption of the pit. The author of Hebrews alludes to the idea of death and perfection several times, such as in Hebrews 2:10, 5:9, 11:40, and 12:23. Some of these are speaking of Jesus, and others are speaking of what lies ahead for us.

This is what Paul now refers to. He has said that he has not “already attained” this state, meaning being “already perfected.” It may seem unusual that he would state this, but the erroneous claim was already circulating that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:18), and that the Day of the Lord had passed as well (2 Thessalonians 2:2). These claims were intended to then show that some had been perfected. They could then lead their followers down wayward paths of belief concerning the super-spiritual state they possessed. This heretical doctrine still exists. David Koresh claimed that he was the Lamb of God of Revelation. Others have made claims that they are the embodiment of Christ, or that they have been perfected. These claims always lead people down the heresy highway.

Paul is warning against such things, stating that he remained in his earthly body and the final goal lay still ahead. Because of this, he contrasts the notion by saying, “...but I press on.” No one presses on towards that which they have already attained. Instead, they look ahead to a prize which is still out of reach. Paul is not speaking of salvation, but of the state which is promised because of salvation. This is important to understand as well. If misinterpreted, one could come to the conclusion that he is still unsure of his own salvation, and was still working to ensure he would – in fact – be saved. Rather, he is speaking of what salvation promises. Until he was “perfected” through death and the new body which lies ahead, he was striving to be as Christ-like as possible while still in his earthly body. This is exactly what he has been talking about prior to this verse.

For him, this was all so “that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” He was striving to be perfected because the perfected Christ had granted him the surety of future perfection. Christ was the initiator and grantor of that promise, and so Paul, admitting that he was still imperfect, perpetually strived for perfection in order to be pleasing to the Perfected One.

His words are certainly given for a warning to all that perfection is not attainable in this life, but that it is rather an ideal that we can and should strive for while we live. Claiming sinless perfection while still in this corruptible body, or claiming that this corruptible body has been cast off prior to the resurrection from the dead, are both voluntary paths down Apostasy Avenue, and which lead directly to Heresy Highway.

Life application: We can and should strive for perfection, and we can and should strive to emulate Christ in all ways, but we should never claim that we have arrived, or follow anyone who makes such a claim. This will only happen when Christ comes and perfects us all together. Until then, let us be wise and sober about our fallen nature lest we get caught up in serious error.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,
Philippians 3:13

The words here restate what he just said in the previous verse. It is an emphasis that his audience is to pay heed to –

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...”

He begins with “brethren” here to ensure that they know they are all on the same level. He is not elevated above them in this most important matter. If this is so, then what he will say pertains to them, and it pertains to any other “brother” in Christ as well. And so, with that understood, he begins. In addition to the emphasis provided by the restated repetition, the words “I” and “myself” are emphatic in the Greek. He is ensuring that he is not counted among any heretic who would claim they have been perfected. He has not “apprehended” this state, and who would be more likely to have done so?

Rather, as an equal with them in this life in Christ, he says, “...but one thing *I do*.” The words “I do” are inserted for clarity, and they do give a good sense of what will be said. There is an activity to his coming words which “doing” fits well. This activity is summed up with the words, “...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.” The things which are behind are the achievements of verses 4-6 which he once could have boasted in. They have been forgotten in order to obtain a far greater prize. They have been disregarded for a more perfect goal which lies ahead.

For those things, he is “reaching forward.” The words “reaching forward” are in the emphatic position. In essence, “...to those things which are ahead, reaching forward.” His eye is on the prize, and in that state, he lunges as a racer would when approaching the finishing line. All of his efforts are being impelled forward for this one thing. The scholar Bengel says, “...with hand and foot, like a runner in a race, and the body bent forward. The Christian is always humbled by the contrast between what he is and what he desires to be. The eye reaches before and draws on the hand, the hand reaches before and draws on the foot.”

Life application: How serious are you about what lies ahead? Are your efforts directed to it, or are you stopping along the way to revel in the here and now. It is true that we live in this world and must be a part of it, but the efforts we put forth now should be in line with the glory which

lies ahead. How effective the church would be if all of us had such a determined attitude towards the perfection which is awaiting us.