

## **“Be Perfect Part 1” (Philippians 3:10–21)(11.15.20)**

Philippians 3:10–21 (NIV84)

<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

<sup>17</sup> Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. <sup>18</sup> For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

### **The word of God for the people of God.**

Title: **“Be Perfect Part 1”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

It is universally understood that Paul is using a metaphor of racing to teach the Philippians about the Christian journey of faith. The Greek Olympic Games are most likely what he had in mind. The judges and the athletes took the rules very seriously. There is debate whether this might be referring to a chariot race or a footrace.

If it is a chariot race, do not imagine the movie version portrayed in Ben Hur. To keep the chariot as light as possible it would have been a small platform for a man to stand on with two wheels. The competitor would certainly be holding on for dear life, straining toward the goal ahead. You would not dare turn your head and look behind because it could mean your life.

When I was in high school, I ran track all three seasons. Both of our sons also ran in high school. So, Carol and I have been to a lot of races in our day. We had told them that we didn't care which sport, but they had to do one season of sports each year.

Our oldest, Joshua was short and slim who didn't seem to have a lot of athletic gifting. Because of this, we did try to steer him towards running long distance. Of course, what do parents know? It wasn't until we were at a cookout and one of the Coast Guard Rescue Swimmers told him he had the perfect build for distance running that Joshua agreed to go out for Cross Country.

His freshman year of running was pretty uneventful. The next summer, we were transferred to Washington DC. After getting settled into our new home in the middle of Prince George's County, I told Joshua I would run with him. Apparently, a year of maturing made a huge difference. Even that first run, I could not keep up with him. Because he was short, his stride was not very long. But, he had a beautiful graceful form, smooth and natural, nearly perfect.

He did very well as a sophomore and by the time he was a senior he was among the top couple runners in a county of nearly 40 high schools. Usually, many teams competed at the same time. More times than not, he would come in first place – claiming the prize.

Now cross-country is not like track. You are running through the woods or across fields. You are going up and down hills, maybe on a narrow path or on a dirt road. The courses are marked with flags, arrows, pylons, and signs, but not always clearly.

In one particular race, we saw Joshua come out of the woods. He was the first one. The next portion of the race was along two edges of a large rectangular field, marked with trees along those two sides. As he was finishing that portion, one of the coaches started frantically signaling to him to get his attention. Joshua was confused because the coach told him that he had run on the wrong side of the trees. He had not gained any advantage by doing so, the distance was the same. Nevertheless, he had not run the course laid for him and the other competitors. If he had continued, he would have been disqualified. The only thing he could do was to return to point where he had gone off course. While he was doing that, many boys were passing, going in the forward direction. Now, he had a lot of ground to make up. He dug deep within himself. Steadily, he made progress passing one or two runners at a time. Unfortunately, he ran out of time as the course came to an end. There had still been two runners in front of him and he finished third.

It is that kind of determination that Paul is lifting up. Paul says that he is modeling that kind of life and he is encouraging his Philippian brothers and sisters to do the same. Joshua set a great example for his teammates, in fact, for all the competitors, who literally followed him.

In our 10<sup>th</sup> verse, Paul talks about his very strong desire to be in a full relationship with Jesus. Paul wants to embrace the power of a resurrected life. Then our closing verse also speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ's power. That power controls everything, and will bring about the transformation of our earthly bodies to our glorified bodies, just like his own glorified body.

BODY:

Paul speaks about being perfect. He speaks about being mature. Last week, when we were taking our Sermon on the Mount self-quiz, one of Jesus' commands was to be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect. Many people just shut off their minds to this concept of seeking perfection. It was a big point of controversy in John Wesley's day, when he strongly advocated for Methodists to seek perfection. Today too, most people dismiss this possibility; but, all things are possible with God.

What is meant by perfect in the New Testament?

τέλειος (*teleios*). adj. **perfect, mature, complete, initiated, fully developed.** *Describes something complete, mature believers, and the perfection of God.*

τελειόω (*teleioō*). vb. **to complete, fulfill, finish, make perfect, consecrate.** *The basic sense is "bring to completion"; this can refer to making something perfect, accomplishing a task, or fulfilling a scripture.* So, Paul is saying here that he is complete in his justification before God. Because of his faith in Jesus, he is in right standing with our heavenly Father. At the same time, Paul is incomplete in his sanctification. He has the seed of perfection planted within him. It has taken root and blossomed. As of yet, it is still the unfolding flower of purity and goodness.

Imagine you are the parent of a ten year old child. You observe this beautiful child and are pleased with what you see. Now, when this same child is a young person of twenty years, you would be disappointed if there had not been growth and progress. You want the child to grow into their true self, to grow into the image of God that the Lord has created them to be.

What have we been created to be? While this seems like a simple question, I fear that most Christians do not know. Then there are those that do know, but do not have the will to embrace the Christian race; to press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called them heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Let us begin with Paul's statement that our citizenship is in heaven. We have the privileges and the responsibilities that go with that citizenship. We have a home in heaven. We submit to a higher authority. We are to be heavenly minded, equipped with an eternal perspective. In the context of our heavenly citizenship, we see and experience this world differently.

2 Corinthians 5:16–21 (NIV84)

<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the

ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Yes, we are Christ's ambassadors, representing Him in this world. We have a ministry of reconciliation. Our message calls on everyone to be reconciled to God; and when that happens, reconciliation between people happens too. Relationships, marriages, and families are healed. Because Jesus took on all our sin and paid the penalty for that sin, we have the amazing promise of becoming the righteousness of God.

Are you growing into that person?

1 Peter 2:9–10 (NIV84)

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Can you take hold of that promise – chosen; part of a priesthood, a royal priesthood. We are holy, set apart, united as a specially purposed nation. We are the possession of God. Claim all the inherent joys and duties for those that are the people of God. Let that thought roll around in your consciousness: people of God, people of God.

My friends, this relationship goes even deeper. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (NIV84)

<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he prayed for all believers: John 17:20–23 (NIV84)

<sup>20</sup> "My prayer is not for them [these disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17:25–26 (NIV84)

<sup>25</sup> "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

We have God the Holy Spirit, God the Father, and God the Son within us. The magnitude of this truth is beyond our comprehension. Do we really believe it? Have we taken hold of it? This Communion with our God is bathed in His supernatural love. What a radical reorientation on our whole existence this truth creates.

These truths define the new creations we are called to be. How can we not be the fertile soil that produces a crop one hundred fold? Through the grace, mercy, and love of God, the fruit of the Spirit is sure to ripen. Galatians 5:22–23 (NIV84) <sup>22</sup> ... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control.

How do we fertilize our soil to keep our fruit crop healthy? Philippians 4:8 (NIV84) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV84) We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

In today's scripture, Paul makes it clear that our race, our striving after perfection is not easy. It always seemed strange to me that this applied to Jesus too. **Hebrews 2:10** (NIV84) In bringing many sons to

glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

**Hebrews 5:7–9 (NIV84)**

<sup>7</sup> During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. <sup>8</sup>

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered <sup>9</sup> and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

We should not expect our perfection to be gained through a different method than our Savior's in that we would disdain suffering. It is integral to the perfecting process. Romans 5:2–4 (NIV84)

<sup>2</sup>...And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope.

1 Peter 4:12–13 (NIV84) *Suffering for Being a Christian*

<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

1 Peter 4:16 (NIV84) However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 1 Peter 4:19 (NIV84) So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Isn't this what Paul taught us in today's scripture? He wants to know the fellowship of sharing in Christ's suffering. We cannot bear up under this suffering under our own power. We must have the power of a resurrected life. We have our Triune God residing within us, so how can we not live up to what we have already attained?

CONCLUSION:

John Wesley said, "The person who does not sincerely endeavor to become a perfect Christian deceives themselves if they think they are a Christian at all." I wonder, in what state of mind might a Christian think, "What is the minimum I can do and get into heaven?" Most likely, no one words it like that, but their actions betray the thought process.

Reverend Andrew Murray wrote a 31 day devotional book called *Be Perfect*. He says, "The perfect heart is a gift from God, to be asked for, to be obtained by prayer. No one will pray for it earnestly, perseveringly, believingly, until he accepts God's word fully that it is a positive command and an immediate duty to be perfect.

A heart perfect in its purpose towards God -- this is only the initial stage. Then there comes the putting on of one grace after another -- the going, from strength to strength, on to perfection -- the putting on, in ever-growing distinctness of likeness, the Lord Jesus, with every trait of His holy image. All this is to be sought and found in prayer too. It is just he who knows most of what it is to be perfect in purpose who will pray most to be perfect in practice too."

We prayed in unison earlier about this journey towards perfection. I encourage you to take your bulletin home and keep this prayer as a regular resource in your daily devotions.

I thank You, O my Father, for the blessed expectation Your word holds out of being perfected in love here on earth; for the blessed witness of the beloved disciple to its truth in him and around him; for the power and light of the Holy Spirit that sheds abroad Your love in our hearts, and makes it all a reality and a consciousness. The Lord will perfect that which concerns each person: to Him be the glory.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.