

## Knowing Christ (Part 4)

### Pursuing Perfection Through Sacrifice

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Would you please open your Bibles to Hebrews 6.

**Hebrews 6:1** Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

Going on to perfection, or maturity, or completion, might just be the unspoken subject of virtually every sermon that is given. I say *unspoken* because the minister does not usually say at the beginning of his sermon, "Well, today we're going to speak about 'going on to perfection'," but on the other hand, each sermon is intended to move us in that direction.

The Greek word translated here *perfection* can be translated either of these three ways. It can be translated *maturity*, it can be translated *completion*, or as the *King James* translators decided, *perfection*.

In this context, *maturity* is probably the best, because of the things that Paul wrote in the previous four or five verses (those that are at the tail-end of chapter 5). But even that leaves us without a right understanding, because the immaturity of these people was not due to the fact that they were young in the church, and neither did the problem lay in ignorance, because Hebrews shows elsewhere that there was a time when they had done much better than they had been doing at the time the letter was written. So they did not lack theological knowledge.

The problem lay in the fact that they were making poor decisions—immature decisions—in order to avoid the suffering that a *right* decision would have brought upon them. It was not that they did not know. They were neglecting to make the right decisions, as Paul made very clear at the beginning of the letter. They were resisting God's guidance.

There is another interesting thing in this verse, and that is, that it does not say what it says in the *King James*—"Let us go on . . ." It says, "Let us be carried forward to perfection." This was intended by Paul to be an admonishment. It is also intended to be an encouragement and an exhortation, all at the same time. It indicates that they are to be carried forward, i.e., moved along by an overwhelming power, if they gave it permission to do so.

This is very interesting because we are beginning to see a responsibility developing here, like other responsibilities that are laid upon us—like circumcision; you might recall when we went through the series on the covenants, we showed you that circumcision was partly a responsibility of God, and partly a responsibility of us. There are places that God says that He is going to circumcise our hearts. On the other hand, He tell us, "Circumcise *your* heart."

We are beginning to see something like that developing here in the context of *becoming mature*, of the context of *becoming complete*, in the context of *becoming perfect*. "Let us be carried forward to perfection." In other words, Paul is implying that there is going to be a power, if we do the right thing, that is going to carry us along toward that destination that we want.

We are going to see a contrast to this in the next scripture that we are going to read, to show very clearly that we are also involved in this process of *moving* us toward perfection—a process in which the major work is done by God; but we have a part to play in this that is very important.

These people were resisting being carried forward probably out of fear, and so the force of this instruction that is given here in Hebrews 6:1 is that it is not personal effort that Paul is talking about here, but rather the responsibility to surrender to this overwhelming power. It is also indicating that this *surrendering* is not something that is done one time, but is continuous. Hang onto that.

You can see, from something that I said just a little bit earlier, that there was a time when these people had done better, and their surrendering to this power was *not* continuous. Now they were neglecting, and they were not surrendering, and they were not being carried on to maturity.

Let us go back to that section in Philippians 3 once again, where I guess you might say, I have milked or drawn at least three or four sermons from. You will see that this follows right on the heels of verse 10, from which I have drawn this present series on suffering and sacrifice and the part that it plays in our coming to know God. I think that we can see from this series that Paul was writing that we are involved in a process leading to what he calls "perfect."

**Philippians 3:12-15** Not that I had 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. 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, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind [Now he has included us in what he is saying.]; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

He says in verse 13 that he has not apprehended or attained, or grasped hold of to the fullness of the reason for why **he** was apprehended or grasped, or held onto by Christ, but that he was pressing on to the end, in verse 14. Then of course in verse 15, he urges us to be of the same mind.

Now back to verse 12 and the word "apprehend" (King James). It is a word that we do not use very much these days, but the Greek word there is drawn from athletic games—actually a running race, and it has the idea here of eager and strenuous exertion to *grasp*, or *seize* upon something. We do use *apprehend* occasionally, and usually it is in something having to do with authorities of some kind, usually the police, when we say the police *apprehended* the criminal, meaning that the police seized him and he is now in their power. Paul says that he has not *yet apprehended* what he was apprehended for, and so he has not grasped onto yet that for which Christ grasped hold of him. So Christ had firm hold of him, but Paul had not yet gotten a firm grip on what it was that he was striving for.

Again *perfect*, in the same verse, means *to complete, to accomplish a full end by reaching the intended goal*. The allusion here is to a foot race. Now there is a very close similarity to this series of verses to those in I Corinthians 9.

**I Corinthians 9:24** Do you not know that those who run in a race .  
..

Philippians 3:12-15 is drawn from a race circumstance, and so is this series of verses here.

**I Corinthians 9:24-26** Do you not know that those who run in a race all run [they go all out], but one receives the prize? ["Prize" is also mentioned in Philippians 3.] Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate [self-controlled, governs himself, or disciplines himself] in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown; but we an imperishable crown. Therefore I run [that is the way Paul runs], not as uncertainty. . .

He does not stagger all over the place. He is saying that when he started this race up, he headed right toward the goal, and nothing was going to deter him. He was not going to be distracted in any way and wander off the course.

**I Corinthians 9:26** . . . Thus fight: not as one who beats the air.

Paul did not shadow-box. He was deadly serious about his responsibility, about running this race.

**I Corinthians 9:27** But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

These words *beat my body* (King James) have the same implication as to give somebody a black eye, or to bruise. He is using very vivid language to show you how hard he disciplined himself, even to the point of like buffeting or bruising. Now both of these word pictures are drawn from the Isthmus games, very similar to the Olympian games, and I have to take it from that, that Paul must have viewed them on occasions.

The only difference between I Corinthians 9 and Philippians 3 is the emphasis. In I Corinthians 9, the emphasis is on the *discipline* that Paul applied to himself as he runs the race. In Philippians 3, the focus is on his exertions, where he is straining every fiber as he runs the race. He is trying to get to the finish line. In either case Paul makes sure that we understand that we are to be persistently concentrated on reaching the goal, not only once the race starts, but even he draws it back to the preparations for the race as well.

So, we are not to allow anything to divert our attention from having a specific and well-defined aim. Paul undoubtedly had a unity of purpose. He was single-minded in that sense, that characterized his entire life, once he was called. His aim was to gain Christ and perfection in Him, and here he is showing his total concentration and expending of effort to reach that goal.

Just reading his words, I think that we can get the picture that this must have caused him a great deal of sacrifice of things that he would have much rather have done. II Corinthians 11 gives us a pretty good idea of some of the things he had to endure as part of his carrying out his responsibility. I know that even in reading them, it is rather daunting to me to think of the things that he went through—that he was beaten with stripes so many times. I think it was five times. And one time he was stoned and left for dead. Another time he spent a night and a day in the deep, floating around on a piece of flotsam and jetsam from a wreck, and constantly in peril in the travels that he made—from robbers and burglars, people who would rob him and whatever else. But he knowingly put up with it and kept right on toward the goal that God had given him in his life.

This is important in regard to something else. Turn to Hebrews 5. I just want to pick out one verse here to connect it to Christ, so that we can understand that the suffering that God requires of us has a purpose in mind. It is not haphazard, as we might think it is, and we have to understand its important to our perfection, our being complete, our being mature.

**Hebrews 5:7-8** Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him

who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

From that we can understand that there is more to obedience than merely submitting. There are implications of suffering here in Philippians 3, and being perfected through the suffering of a race by being tested against the course. Feed yourself into that. God has required every one of us to run a course, which we will see in just a little bit.

Before we go any further, and so that we do not get too discouraged, understand that the word *perfect*, or *perfected* does not mean or imply being absolutely faultless, the way we normally think of being perfect. It rather means being completed, or qualified, or fit. All those words that I have given you are synonyms for this one Greek word *perfect*.

I think an illustration might be something like this, as to how this word fits us, and why it is important that we each understand that we are running our own race, we are running our own course, and we are not to compare ourselves with the course that another person is running. We might say that a Phillip's head screwdriver is *perfect* for use with a Phillip's head screw, but that does not imply that the screwdriver is not dinged up, or does not have some kind of rust on it. Rather, we might say that the screwdriver was prepared to carry out that function, and so it works *perfectly*.

We are all not being prepared for God's Kingdom for exactly the same thing. There are generalities. We are going to be kings and priests, but we are going to be in a government, and a government has very many bureaus and offices within it. Christ said that He would prepare a place for us.

Obviously we are not going to be kings in the same sense as the original twelve. Those offices are already gone. David's office is gone. I am sure that Abraham's office is gone, and Moses' office is gone, and the prophets of the past, their offices are gone as well, and Paul's office is gone as well. So there are overlappings in what we are being prepared for. There are generalities, but everybody runs his own race. That is very important that you understand that.

In this same book of Philippians, God says that He will finish what He starts. But do not forget what it says in Hebrews 6:1, "Let us be carried forward." We have to give God the permission for Him to do His creative works, and that wonderful book of Hebrews was written to get that lesson across. These people were regressing because, whatever the circumstances were, they were failing now to make the right decisions, because I am sure they were afraid to make the sacrifices which the right decisions they knew were going to cost, and they were in danger of not being prepared for God's Kingdom.

So they were acting child-like. All you parents know the way kids work. They usually do not work at something very well, and we associate the way they work at something with their being immature, and that was the immaturity of the Hebrews that Paul was writing to. They were losing their focus, and the world was becoming bigger and bigger to them.

**Hebrews 12:1** Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Here we have another running metaphor. The difference here is that this metaphor is drawn from a much longer race—a marathon type.

**Hebrews 12:2** 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now do you think that the cross is an allusion to suffering? Do you think the cross being mentioned here is an allusion to sacrificing? Yes it is. Anybody who is running a race is going to have to sacrifice if he wants to win—win his own race. In this race, it is not a race against other people, it is a race to finish yourself.

**Hebrews 12:3-4** For consider Him [think about Him] who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you be weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

Paul really pokes their bubble there. They thought that they were putting up with a lot, and he said no, they have not.

The major difference here between this and Philippians 3 and I Corinthians 9 is that the foot race is a longer race requiring perseverance, and whereas Philippians 3 is on concentrated effort and exertion, I Corinthians 9 is on disciplining the body. So we have a pretty complete picture from what Paul is drawing for us here verbally. We have *discipline*, we have *concentrated effort*, and *perseverance*. All of them somewhat overlap as to meaning and application, but every one of them has distinct differences as well in meaning and application, but all of them are used by Paul to point toward the same cause—and that is, to rise above what we are and to become perfect, to be become like Christ—to know Him.

Back to Philippians 3. We are going to go through this again, but this time I want us to see more clearly what his mind-set was when he wrote this. I want us to see this in context with fellowship, or sharing, or participating in Christ's sufferings. I also want us to see this in the light of something else, and that is the cry or the teaching that is out there against what is called "a work religion."

Anybody who is running a race knows that they have to work at it. Here we have the apostle, who is accused by the world (maybe *accused* is the wrong word), who was used by the world, associating his name and his teachings with "no works." That does not sound like they are interpreting Paul correctly to me, just from what we have seen that he does. He disciplined himself, he concentrated his effort, and he ran with perseverance.

Verse 12 is important in regard to seeing his mind-set. He says in the middle of that verse, "But I press on." This means that he *pursues*. Follow after (KJV) does not give us the right picture. It is not strong enough. Paul was



chasing. See, he was not just dawdling around behind; he was pursuing after it. He was chasing, he was pressing on, or as the *Living Bible* says (and I think that this is rather ironic, because if there is ever a Bible that is "anti-works," it is this one.), "I *work* towards." I think that is rather amusing.

I think we can see that the apostle Paul was surrendered to the power that was carrying him forward. That requires making the right choice, and then expending time and energy. In the light of the running-a-race metaphor with its picture of people straining toward a goal—a great deal of time and energy, "work" is expended. Professional athletes work. In that regard, if they want to hold their position on a professional team, I do not care whether it is football, or whether it is basketball, those men have to really put out, because there is somebody on their tail all the time, either the coach or some other guy who is coming there to take his place on the team, unless he really puts out.

The reason that Paul was working toward this goal is so that he may apprehend, or grasp, or lay hold of the very thing that Christ had grasped, or laid hold of him for. Again he identified this as being *perfect*; but he also says in verse 13 that he was not yet perfect.

Now there is hardly a clearer statement given by Paul that he understood what God desires, and is doing more than merely saving us. If all God was trying to do was save us, why would Paul, one of the primary teachers in the new church, write things like this about how much effort he was making? It just does not make any sense, that he would give all this teaching on works, and show not that he was merely working, but he was showing what many people would consider to be an extremism. I feel absolutely certain that if modern-day Protestants were able to observe the apostle Paul, they would accuse him of being a man who believed in "a works religion."

Philippians was written about 25 years after Paul was converted, or as the world would say, *after he was saved*; and yet he was still not perfect. And at the time that he was writing this, he was still straining for it. That ought to tell us something. Not only was he straining for it, he said that he had not even grasped onto it yet.

Let me clarify something. Paul was not making a statement here that he was not assured of salvation, but rather acknowledging that after God has called us, brought us to repentance, forgiven our sin by Christ's blood, and granted us His Spirit, there is still human responsibility to work toward the completion of God's purpose. And as Paul saw it, to work *hard*. At the time that God does those things, justification has been accomplished, but *sanctification unto holiness* has just begun, and it is sanctification unto holiness that occupies the longest period, time-wise. For the overwhelming majority of us, is is the most difficult part of God's creative works in us. It is in this period that most of the suffering and sacrifice occurs as well.

Remember what I said on many occasions that this is a cooperative effort involving both God and us, and it does not come without cost to us. In fact, I think we can say that in one sense it is the most costly thing that we will ever purchase. Now consider the works, the energy costs, and the sacrifice that was involved just in those three metaphors that are given at the beginning of this sermon. It is the striving to lay hold on to perfection that is going to be *the cause* of the suffering and sacrifice. But at the same time, it has also to be kept in mind that without it, there will be no prize, no reward; not salvation—no *reward* in this high calling in Christ Jesus.

Let us go to a scripture that I think you will be surprised has the word *perfect* in it, back in Matthew 19. This is a time the rich young ruler came to Christ and said, "What must I do to have life?"

**Matthew 19:21** Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, and follow Me."

I want you to notice. Let us read this very carefully. I will not expound yet, but I want you to notice—"If you want to be perfect, go, sell that you have. . . [sacrifice, be willing to suffer]and you shall have treasure. . ."

The suffering and sacrifice is tied to *giving to the treasure*—not salvation, as we are going to see.

**Matthew 19:22-29** But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus heard it, and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Then answered Peter and said to Him, "See, we have left all [given up, sacrificed] and followed You. Therefore what shall we have? And Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life."

"If you will be perfect. . ." The young man viewed the cost of being perfect too great of a sacrifice. Well, Jesus then expounded on the fact that wealth has the proclivity of influencing us to be less inclined to sacrifice it for qualities of greater value. The proverb says that "a rich man's wealth is his high wall" (Proverbs 18:11)—where his security is.

The disciples knew enough to understand that sacrifice played a major role in what Jesus was teaching at this time, and it spurred their concern as to whether there would be any compensation for the sacrifices they were making. That is why they said, "We have left all, and followed You." Well, Jesus came right back to show that God is exceedingly generous. But He also makes it clear that the sacrifice is not for everlasting life, but rather is tied to reward. In this teaching right here, sacrifice is seen as an investment for future reward. The offices that Jesus said that these men would receive was tied to *left all*. Everlasting life is added. You see, "and shall receive eternal life." Salvation is by grace. It is not earned. But the offices, which were a reward, were tied to leaving all.

It is becoming obvious, I think, that Paul is not going to run his race like the hare in *The Tortoise and the Hare* fable. Paul did not take the approach to his responsibility that he was a sure winner no matter what he did. If you remember, the hare took a nap during the race. He was so confident, so sure, that he lay down and took a nap. While he was taking a nap, the tortoise passed him up and went across the finish line.

There is a moral to that story, and so I have to ask this question: I wonder how many of us have run our spiritual race like the hare? Well brethren, all of us have! Every single one of us has run our race like that, and I can say that on the authority of the Bible, because God shows in that parable in Matthew 25, that at the time of the end, every one of the virgins went to sleep! At the most critical time of history, we went to sleep! How are you running your race?

Now here is a bridegroom, who is just about ready to come, and at least half of them hear the cry that the bridegroom comes, and they do wake themselves up. Surely brethren, it ought to be time for us to awake out of sleep, just like Paul said there in Romans 13, because the time is later than it was before when we were first converted.

Back to Philippians 3. Paul says in verse 13, "This one thing I do. . ." I think that we, as we counted, would count them as two, that he links them both together as parts of one operation. Here is advice from God's Word of one or two factors one must do in order to win his spiritual race. These are things which *must* be done if we are going to have the same kind of dedication toward the completion of God's purpose, as Paul did. "Forgetting those things which are behind, and eagerly straining forward to what lies ahead."

Understand this in context with the concentration that is being taught here. In everyday life, distractions can be disastrous. I will tell you, I was almost forcibly reminded of this being back in Los Angeles for the first time in a year, and being on those crowded freeways out there, where there are three and four lanes of traffic all traveling, almost bumper to bumper, at 65 miles an hour. On the freeways in L.A. you can go 65 miles an hour, and all it takes is a momentary distraction for you to wander out of your lane, and wham!—five, ten, fifteen automobiles can be piled up in a matter of five seconds. And for somebody it might be *all she wrote*, to just be momentarily

distracted by something that catches the eye out of the corner, or catches their attention in the automobile, and they turn their head, they drift, and crash. Parts of automobile are all over the place, and maybe parts of people as well.

When I worked in the steel mill, we were frequently told—I mean *frequently*—that the highest percentage of dangerous accidents took place at two times during the day: just before lunch, and just before quitting time. The reason is obvious, because the men would take their mind off their job because they were looking forward to lunchtime, looking forward to a little bit of rest, looking forward to going home. They would take their mind off the job, and sometimes in a steel mill, all it took was just like on the freeway—and you were chopped liver, buddy. And so they were constantly reminding us not to allow ourselves to do that, because they did not want to see us dead. Maybe their reason was monetary, but nonetheless it was good to take their advice, and pay attention just before lunchtime, and just before going home. They attributed this to being distracted.

There are all kinds of distractions out there for us. Most of them are not momentary things, but sometimes momentary things can draw out attention for long periods of time—things like Jesus pointed out in places, like the pursuit of wealth, or the pursuit of things. We can add to this modern-day things, like over-emphasis on sports, on clothing, on physical charm. Jesus called these things *all kinds of evil desires that rise up and choke the word*. He did not mean that the things were inherently sin, but if we allow them to divert our attention, they become evil because they are aiding us in missing the mark.

Remember what Paul said there in Hebrews 12:1, "Let us lay aside every weight which so easily ensnares us." It is interesting that Paul wrote in I Corinthians 9:24, "So run, that you may obtain. Do not run, speculating about what others will do, or will not do, but see to your own running, because you are running your own race." It is just another way of saying, to discipline yourself, to concentrate on your course, because distraction hinders you. Do not allow yourself to get distracted by anybody else who is in the race.

The other part of Paul's charge here is, *to forget those things which are behind*. It is a way of saying do not look back at what might have been, or had been. He says do not look back at the part of the race that you have already covered. Think of a runner in a race. If a runner looks back, he is undoubtedly going to lose speed, he may wander out of his lane, he might bump into another runner. There are all kinds of things that can happen when the runner takes his eyes off the goal that he is trying to reach for. So, do not look back!

Jesus said, "No man putting his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." He also said (probably the outstanding example in all the Bible of someone who looked back), "Remember Lot's wife." The past is past. There is nothing that can be done about it. It cannot be improved. It cannot be changed. Nothing about it can enhance what has already occurred. We live in the present, always looking toward the future, and when we look back, that hinders us.

There is one more thing that I want to pick out here. Spiritually, this is a deliberate discarding of what lies in the past. This word discarding is kind of interesting, because one author of a commentary went so far as to say that this does not merely mean *pushing the past into the background*, but obliterating it. Do you know where he got that? From the Sodom and Gomorrah thing. God *obliterated* Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's and Lot's wife's past. Lot was spared but Lot's wife looked back and was changed into a pillar of salt. I thought that was really a vivid illustration.

So the overall picture here is one of Paul striving for unwavering progression toward perfection, and I think Paul shows an ardor here that virtually all those called into Christianity would have a hard time imitating. I have no doubt that this man really pleased God, and especially those of us who live here in the time of the end, especially in this Protestant society. We have been so brainwashed by the false teaching that all God is trying to do is save us that we become very easily distracted. We take salvation just as a matter of course—it is already in the bank, it is for us—and we forget all about the fact that God's creation of us is not complete, and it requires our cooperation, and we have to submit to Him in order for that creation to take place.

And so the works have nothing to do with salvation; it has everything to do with God's creative work to complete His creation of us so that we will be prepared for His Kingdom, for the job that He wants us to perform in His family. Was Paul foolish for straining so hard, for being so focused, to reach a state of living that he could never attain to? Why should we do the same? Well, there are two basic reasons, and number 1 is: God expects it.

**II Peter 3:14** Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things [the return of Christ], be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

It sounds to me like Peter agreed with Paul.

**II Peter 3:17-18** You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand [We have been warned about the return of Christ, the establishment of the Kingdom of God.], beware lest you also fall away from your own steadfastness [in running the race], being led away with the error of the wicked [this Protestant society that is around us]; but grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever.

To be at peace means with the secure feeling, the contentment that comes from knowing that you put forth effort; to be diligent.

Without spot means without dissipation or carousing, which is so common in the world around us; *to be irreproachable*. So Peter wants us to make intense efforts to be morally pure.

Beware means *to be on guard*. Avoid being distracted and carried away. Do not wander away.

Now the emphasis through this whole chapter is on *stability*. **Be steadfast**. Then he says "*grow*."

Did you ever look at it this way? That is a **command** from God! It does not say *grow if you can*. God expects us to grow. He commands us, and brethren, it does not happen like magic in Christianity anymore than it does in secular

life. One commentator said that Christianity is like riding a bicycle. If you do not keep moving, you fall off. I did hear Mr. Armstrong say, *there is no such thing as "standing still" in Christianity*. If you are not going forward, you are going to be swept backwards. Even *standing still*, he said, you are going to fall behind everybody else if you just try to keep even with where you have been.

Then I heard another minister say one time that if you evaluated yourself fifteen years ago, and then fifteen years later you evaluated yourself again according to the same way you evaluated yourself fifteen years ago, i.e., against the world—if you measured yourself in the world, you have actually gone backwards, because the world has gone backwards. There is no such thing as "standing still" in Christianity and winning the race.

Is God too hard? Are you too hard on your children if you expect them to grow in going to school—growing in knowledge, growing in understanding, growing in wisdom, growing in maturity? Do you parents consider yourselves too hard because you expect your children to **grow**? No, God is not too hard. He expects us to grow. But just like your children have to make effort in school, so do we have to make effort in this school to be prepared for what God wants us to do in His Kingdom. He is not being hard on us.

So point number 1 is: We are commanded to grow, and God expects it.

Number 2 is equally important, and that is: that the prize that Paul spoke of there in Philippians 3 only goes to those who do it. This is so logical, it is easy to understand. Does the kid who goes to school and does not do anything get the diploma? He does not get the reward. He does not get the prize. It is the same way with God. God is not being hard on us. The running of our course may be difficult for us, but boy! The prize is so great! We ought to be thankful that it is hard like that, that He put so much trust in us that He is willing to put us on a route there that is very very difficult; and for us, it is like we are in a steeple chase, not just a run around some kind of an oval.

**II Timothy 4:6-8** For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race [Paul ran the race successfully—



and he knew it!], I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown [not eternal life, but a reward] of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Paul says, "I'm now ready to be offered." It is interesting in the Greek, because what Paul is doing there is he is picturing himself as a *drink offering*. Every burnt offering that was made was accompanied by a meal offering, and also a drink offering—just like a meal was being presented to God; so there was grain, there was meat, and there was wine. The drink offering was wine. The drink offering consisted of about a quart of wine, and it was poured out at the base of the altar as part of the burnt offering. As a matter of fact, it was the last act of the offering—just like you and I usually drink our coffee, tea, or milk, whatever it happens to be, at the end of the meal.

It was not done in one large pouring, but gradually—a little bit here, a little bit there, during the course of the offering. But the very last part, the very last act that concluded everything was the *pouring out* of the remainder that was in the cup or the jar that they were using at the time. There is a beautiful picture here. Paul was the drink offering, and it pictures a living sacrifice being given gradually over a person's life, and then finally gradually ebbing away, just like in a cup the final drips go down—and he is then completely consumed on the altar.

When Paul said "finally," do you know what that means? It means *only one thing remains*, or *as a result of this*; and the only thing that remained was the giving of the crown, because he had fought a good fight, he had finished the race, he guarded the faith.

I am going to read this to you from the *West Translation*, and it is kind of interesting because he puts it into English in much the same way as the sequence of words appear in the Greek. Think about the beginning of the sermon and the straining and so forth, because this series of verses begins like this:

The desperate straining, agonizing contest marked by its beauty of technique, I, like a wrestler, have fought to the finish, and at present am resting in its victory. My race, I, like a runner, have

finished, and at present am resting at the goal. The faith committed to my care, I, like a soldier, have kept safely through everlasting vigilance, and have delivered it again to my Captain; and henceforth there is reserved for me the victor's laurel wreath of righteousness which the Lord will award me on that day, the just Umpire; and not only to me, but also to all those that have loved His appearing, and as a result have their love fixed on it.

What do you do with people or things that you love? You consume your life on them. Did you notice those words *desperate, agonizing, straining, wrestler, fought, runner, finished, soldier, everlasting vigilance, as a result*? Every one of them an energy-packed word, and attached to reward—the *crown of righteousness*. And he was content because he knew that he had made the effort.

Now back to Matthew 25.

**Matthew 25:24-30** "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid [Hebrews—out of fear. They were making bad decisions.], and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have that is yours.' "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received my own back with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has [accomplished, that is; run the race, finished it] more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Does God expect it? You had better believe that He expects us to make effort. There is every reason to strive as hard as we can, and maybe even try

to match the apostle Paul, as he urges us to do. So remember those two factors. 1) God expects us to make the effort, and 2) the prize goes to those who do.

Let us go to a couple very familiar scriptures, as we begin to draw this to a close.

**Romans 12:1-2** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable [spiritual] service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

**Ephesians 5:1-2** Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

The standard is to walk in life [love], as Christ also has loved us, and given Himself for us.

We are involved in a way of life whose guiding principle, once we are called and converted, is *the seeking of perfection*. Salvation is assured because of Christ's work; but God's creative efforts on us have really just gotten in gear and really under earnest. It requires that we seek perfection. All the way back in Amos 4 God urges us to seek Him and **live**! Live, because, as He sees us in our sins, we are as good as dead, because that is what the wages of sin is, and He desires us to come out of what has produced death—as far as we possibly can.

Sin produces death, and He wants us to come out of it. That is what the *seeking of the perfection* is. It is coming out of sin. And whether we ever reach perfection is not the point. Maybe it is even immaterial, because we are going to run out of time. Either Christ is going to return, or we are going to die. But even more importantly, if we do this, the mind-set that is developed

pursuing perfection ensures that when we are changed at the resurrection, we will continue living in that manner because the mind will have been trained to think and act that way.

Let us look at a couple of scriptures back in Psalms. You will see there is a pattern here.

**Psalms 86:5** For you Lord are good.

**Psalms 100:5** For the LORD is good.

**Psalms 104:28** That you give them they gather: you open your hand, they are filled with good.

**Psalms 106:1** Praise you the LORD, O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good.

Now this is a very often-repeated statement, especially in the Psalms, and it is this One that we are to imitate, into whose image we are being created, who is described as *good*.

What does this have to do with suffering and sacrifice, and the seeking of perfection? Well, brethren, the seeking of perfection is derived from God's purpose. He is perfect, He is holy, He is transcendent in character, wisdom, love, mercy, anger, i.e., in every aspect of His person. He is good and He is creating man in His image, and Jesus said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." In other words, He was a perfect reflection—that if the Father became a man, He would live in the same way that Christ did, and we are to imitate them. We are to follow them as dear children, Paul said, and "He is good."

You might remember in a previous sermon that I said that God does not require us to sacrifice anything that is **not** good. Now consider this. Jeremiah 17:9 says that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. The Hebrews did not have a word that corresponds to our word *mind*, so they used the *heart* as the symbol of man's cognitive, emotional center—his intellectual center. They put in *their heart*. We say

*mind*. "The mind of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?"

Now does a desperately wicked mind produce good, as God is good? It is an impossibility. In fact right in that series of verses, right in verse 9, that *desperately wicked* is even better translated ***incurably sick***. In other words, even God cannot do anything about it. It cannot be healed. He has to give us a new heart, a new mind. He has to give us one that is **good**—and that is the one we have to operate on and by.

What I am leading to here is where the sacrifice and the suffering comes in, because Galatians 5 shows us that these two are diametrically opposed to one another; that is, the human heart and the spirit of God are diametrically opposed to one another and they are at war with one another. They fight a battle, as it were, within us. We are put in the middle and we have to make the choice which way we are going to go, and Paul said we have the choice of choosing to be carried on by this great power that God has put in us—*carried forward to perfection*—or we can make the choice to give in to human nature. The suffering comes because human nature is being denied what it wants to do, and like a four-year old spoiled brat, it fights tooth and toenail, it whines, it cries, it tries to make you feel as though this is the worse thing that has ever been done. It does everything on earth to try to get its way.

Tell me something. Is sacrificing to be good as God is good, too hard to do? Is it asking us to give up something that is good? Impossible! Human nature thinks it is good, but God does not think it is good at all. It is something evil that is rising up to choke us. In any warfare there is going to be suffering, and the conflict of this war that is going on within us between choosing to submit to human nature or to surrender to God, continuously, is what causes the suffering. Ultimately it will cause persecution, because as we become more God-like, the world will hate us more and more. But it is the choosing to surrender to God that is ultimately the cause of the sacrificing, the suffering.

Now let us conclude in Romans the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter. Paul confirms this for me and for you.

**Romans 7:15** For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

**Romans 7:18** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) nothing good dwells. . .

Nothing. Zilch. Zero. And this is what God wants us to give up. He does not require of us that we give up things that are good.

**Romans 7:18 . . .** For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

We are moving toward goodness, not away from it.

**Romans 7:21-22** I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. [It was in his mind.]

**Romans 7:24-25** O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The great power that Paul implied in Hebrews 6 when he said, "Let us be carried forward to perfection."

Our part in this is very small. In reality, all we have to do is make the right choice and take those first faltering steps toward doing it—and God supplies the rest. But human nature has to be sacrificed, and this brings forth suffering. So this process and its fruits of suffering and sacrifice is not at all unusual. Any great goal, any project worth its salt, is going to produce the same result, i.e., *sacrifice and suffering*.

If we desire and do, or desire to be something greatly enough, we will make the commitment and pay the price for whatever stands in the way of our accomplishing it. Paul said in I Corinthians 9 that others do this for a worldly crown. We are to do it for the rewards that go with eternal life.