

Brent Alderman
240.818.3053

brent.alderman@capitolcom.org

THE ONLY GOAL THAT MATTERS (Philippians 3:12-16)

The Summer Olympics begin next week and I'll be watching. Will you? It's always a great display of talented, hard-working young people who have risen to the top of their respective events. I'm amazed every time I see the determination and tenacity each athlete shows.

I can't believe it has been 24 years ago, but during the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, I remember watching one of the most remarkable races. A British runner named Derek Redmond was competing (and doing very well) in the 400 meter semifinal when he pulled his right hamstring.

Redmond fell to the ground, grabbing his leg in agony, but eventually got up and began limping toward the finish line. It was then that his father bounded out of the stands to put his arm around his hurting son and help him reach his goal. What a moment! I can't recall who won the race, but I remember Derek Redmond who never gave up until he crossed the finish line.

The apostle Paul would have watched the Olympics with us, I think. He knew sports and sometimes referred to them when talking about the Christian life. Wrestling, boxing and foot races show up in the examples he uses. In our passage for this study, he compares our journey to a race and he also shows a great tenacity to run well and reach the final goal.

FALLIBILITY IN THIS LIFE

*Philippians 3:12 – **Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect**, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*

Earlier in this chapter, Paul claimed his human accomplishments and status were garbage compared to knowing Christ in the fullest way. That's what he means when he says that he has not yet obtained "this". He knows well and acknowledges that in this earthly life, even those who have been saved by God's grace will

never be perfect, but are expected to grow to be more like Christ. This is a life-long pursuit while in this earthly existence and actually proves that one's heart has been changed by the gospel of Christ. Sinless perfection will never happen in our current state, but in the race we're running, we have the goal of changing into the image of Christ, doing what he would do and thinking how he would think.

*1 John 1:9, 10 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar**, and his word is not in us.*

*2 Corinthians 3:18 - And **we all**, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed** into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

*2 Peter 3:18 - But **grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

Paul knew he had a long way to go to be like Christ, and so do we. But is that our goal? Are we praying for that? Are we consciously striving to reach the finish line of being conformed more and more into the example of the Savior? With his help, it is possible. This process is sanctification and without it, we will not grow in grace.

FORGET YOUR PAST

*Philippians 3:13a - Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind***

Look at Paul's past. He had personally persecuted those who followed Jesus. The first time we hear of him in Acts 7:58, he is overseeing the stoning of Stephen for preaching the gospel and then approving of the same (Acts 8:1).

Although he was aware of that his whole life (and it humbled him), he didn't let that past keep him from pushing forward toward knowing Christ deeper.

We have to do the same thing if we are to grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus. Fixating on past failures only holds us back from running our race unimpeded. The goal is spending eternity with him along with the many who put their faith in him.

*Hebrews 12:1, 2 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.***

FORGE AHEAD TO YOUR GOAL

*Philippians 3:13b, 14 - and straining forward to what lies ahead, **I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

Paul constantly thought this way. When writing to the churches in Galatia, he was frustrated with their lack of endurance in the "race" of Christian obedience and confronted them on it.

*Galatians 5:7 - **You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?***

Earlier in this letter to the Philippians, Paul underlined his goal of running his race well, keeping the ultimate finish line in mind. This was the only motivation that mattered to him.

*Philippians 2:16 - holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ **I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.***

The questions we all must ask ourselves when we consider the mindset of Paul are, "What is my motivation for life? What am I striving for? Am I even pursuing the right thing in life? If not, what steps do I need to take to run on the right track toward the only goal that matters?"

The tragedy of many people's lives is that they invest their entire being in pursuits that are only temporary and ultimately unsatisfying. Human relationships, money, political power, ease and pleasure will all fade, leaving us wanting something more lasting.

Paul's clear teaching is that as far as his life is concerned, he will not be diverted from reaching the finish line of becoming perfected by God himself, to obtain his salvation from the One who promised it. This is the prize to be gained in the end.

FOCUS ON MATURE THINKING

*Philippians 3:15, 16 - **Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.***

Paul isn't talking about being mature in age, but in spiritual development. He wants us to think the way he is thinking. For those who are growing into more Christlikeness, the pattern of thinking should be clear: run the race with the final prize in mind.

If someone isn't thinking this way (or is more immature spiritually), Paul is confident that God will speak to that person so that they will see the importance of running their race in a better way and having their mindset changed to reflect that outlook.

The exhortation Paul ends with here is that we hold fast to the spiritual standards we know to be right. This gave him the ability to say near the end of his life:

*2 Timothy 4:7, 8 - **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.***