

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2009: MORNING SERVICE

### Opening reading:

**Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: (Psalm 95:6-7)**

**Sing before:** Scripture Versification 2-7:1 [Revelation 15: 2-4]

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm of praise: Psalm 18:14

**Confession of faith:** Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy catholic\* Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

**Amen.**

*After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm Scripture Versification 15-2:3*

Law

Psalm: Scripture Versification 15-2:3 [Revelation 2:1-7]

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

**Amen**

Psalm 33:2,11

**Scripture reading:** Philippians 3

**Scripture text:** Philippians 3:12-16

**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. 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; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. (Philippians 3:12-16)**

Is a believer, as such, perfected in faith?

In this passage God the Holy Spirit uses the experiences of the apostle Paul in pointing the way to the soldiers.

- The church at Philippi consisted of retired soldiers from many cultures and nations.
- Aggravating the problem even more were the Judaists, who with all sorts of alien preaching, caused distortions and confusion.

The apostle Paul, with reference to his own life experiences, explained to the believers how a person would find the Lord – and what you must do should you be a true believer!

Is this Bible passage really of such importance?

- Of course, because by nature we are so sinful, we need to be continually reminded that conversion does not mean that it is sufficient to say that you have accepted the gospel of redemption by the Lord!
- This is only the starting point because with that we were not immediately perfect and holy.
- Becoming holy is a continual process throughout our lives. It actually requires all our energy until we leave this life entering into the direct presence of God.

Up to verse 3 the apostle Paul is dealing with the theology of Judaism.

- Those people strongly believed that through their works they were building up a large supply of holiness.
- They believed that the Lord did not have much of a choice - He was obliged, due to everything attained through their works, to reward them with eternal bliss.
- *In this letter he teaches that this is in fact incorrect – attaining bliss by means of works alone does not work!*

Afterwards (verses 4-11) he gives his personal background.

- He has an impressive testimonial as a Pharisee, placing him quite higher than the people boasting about bliss attained through works!
- Then he tells that he gave up all of that. He gave it up for something else!
- He attained his justification and righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are theologians referring to this statement of Paul as the profit and loss account of his life.

- Because he states that he lost and gave up all his human profits from the past, this is possibly true.
- But he has a very large gain account to show: He is incorporated in the righteousness, love and redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- His loss was thus his gain!

With this data in mind the Holy Spirit led the apostle Paul to effect the growth in sanctification of the Philippine congregation.

Paul refers to himself: even though he gave up everything, starting right from scratch in the Lord Jesus, he is still a long way from perfection. He is not yet at the resurrection from death.

It takes a lot of insight from any person to realise what you are able and unable of – in other words, exactly where your spiritual capabilities lie.

Therefore he wrote to them:

**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)**

Paul realised very well that he has not yet reached perfection.

- But he strives and presses on trying to reach it and lay his hands on it.
- He wants to grab and own this perfection just like the Lord Jesus grabbed him, making him His property.

Up to here we are at ease reading what is written in the Bible. It does become somewhat of a problem should we place our own names in it.

- Is our judgement of our own spiritual and faith capabilities really on standard?
- Is it not so that often we consider ourselves higher than we should?

Is it not possibly so that we are too proud of our faith and faith matters?

- Maybe we sometimes think that all is well with our faith (measured by our own yardstick) whilst we actually are wanting – and that we really do need the mercy of the Lord Jesus and should strive towards it.

Consider the following matters which all pertain to this verse and to us:

- *Paul does not state that the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus is lacking.*
- It is sufficient and perfect – therefore there is no conviction of anybody redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Our curse has been removed.

In this passage the Bible deals with becoming holy.

- It means: how do I get rid of the taint and miseries of sin in my life.
- We are just as imperfect and tainted as Paul. He is aware that he is imperfect.
- He also is aware that his perfect glorification will take place when he is resurrected from death. In verse 21 he spells it out:  
**..who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.**  
 (Philippians 3:21)

This brings us to a next important point Paul is underlining in this verse: He knows he is imperfect!  
**Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that ..**(Philippians 3:12)

He has not reached it yet – thus he still is imperfect.

- But he is striving towards it!
- He is putting all his energy into it: **but I press on!**

We would like to believe that Paul was a spiritual giant. We could think that he would be satisfied with the standard of his faith!

- Paul knew that the Lord Jesus justified him.
- He also knew that he was chosen
- *But he also knew that becoming holy was a process continuing through your whole life.*

Paul said: **Not that I have already attained ...that**

What is the **that** which he has not yet attained?

- Maybe he is referring to the complete glory in the Lord Jesus Christ –in fact, with that, he states that he is not perfect yet.
- He could also refer to the greatness of knowing the Lord Jesus (verse 10)
- He could even infer that it is the power through which the Lord Jesus resurrects us from death if we, for His sake, suffered till death!

The word he uses here for **perfect** when writing: Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, (World English Bible) is the same word used by the Lord Jesus on the cross when he said: **It is finished!** (John 19:30)

- This word encompasses something of all the following matters: fulfilled, finished, attained.
- The word may also mean *maturity* and *fully equipped*.

Thus there is a goal we have to reach.

- This goal is a specific standard of fulfilment or growth towards maturity.
- We must come to where the Lord Jesus changed us to by His atonement.
- The contents in the whole of this teaching by Paul reveal that our faith demands great perseverance from us.
- It demands spiritual stamina.

Therefore he uses a word from the arena of the Olympic games: I **press on**.

- He is inside a chariot in the arena and he is pursuing the other contestants.
- He describes how, accompanied by the Lord, he spends every day of his life – he is pursuing perfection.
- Should he not use his fullest concentration, he would not complete the race nor remain inside the chariot – he would not even survive it.

In attaining this goal Paul is making use of each and every muscle and nerve.

We Christians love the Lord Jesus. We realise the enormous mercy He bestowed upon us.

- Therefore it is our desire to obey Him in all He demands of us.
- Under the guidance of God the Holy Spirit we learn to hate sin more and more.
- Our heart's desire is to acquire the mercy of the redemption and re-creation and to grow in it.

In all this striving there is something that we may try to control: that is to be spiritually healthy.

- Just as a person must be physically fit to be able to run in the Olympic arena, so we have to be spiritually fit to be able to strive for perfection in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- This only means that we have to grab all the means, put within our reach by the Lord, and make it our own.
- These are matters such as our obligations around the Day of the Lord, prayer, sacraments, personal scripture reading and Bible study.

We have a serious calling to persevere in the faith and the mercy of God.

- Even though we know that we are preserved by the omnipotent mercy of God we must persevere.
- Even though we know that we are preserved by the omnipotent mercy of God, still the Lord is asking for our responsibility.

Do you notice how sharply Paul is focussing on the goal towards which the Lord Jesus is taking him?

**... press on toward the goal to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**

(Philippians 3:13-14)

He is thus focussing on what lies ahead – on the future of eternity with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is calculating and determined to complete this earthly race for the Lord Jesus.

How can we reach this ideal? Paul says that he is pressing on because he wants to attain the prize?

- How can it be, we are many racing in this arena – and only one can have the prize!
- What about all the others? Do they become lost without a prize?

This is exactly the point! The Lord Jesus has already acquired this prize for all of us!

- We only have to pursue and grab what He has already attained.
- Had He not already grabbed it, we would have never reached it.
- Therefore none of us pursuing this prize and high calling are losers!

The fact is also that God, with the promise of redemption and eternal life through Jesus Christ, grabbed us.

- God Himself grants us the will to strive ahead under the guidance and inspiration of His Holy Spirit.
- One day we, like the Lord Jesus, will be perfect.  
**For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord, Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things to himself.** (Philippians 3:20-21)

That day we will see the Lord face to face!

**For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known.** (1 Corinthians 13:12)

- Thus we cannot and may not get stuck in the faith.
- Our lives may also not stagnate.
- Day by day we must progress on this road in becoming holy!

**Amen**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 103:3

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give you peace.

**Amen.**

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**Scripture Modern King James Version**