

Maturing in Christ

Philippians 3:15-16

Every four years, athletes from around the globe gather to compete in the Olympic Games. Though the sporting events are varied, the athletes' goal is singular—to win gold, silver, and bronze medals for their countries. The world's fastest and best-trained runners never fail to enthrall us (and leave us breathless!) as they compete in the track and field events. As we watch the races, we take for granted the athletes' iron legs, reaching arms, straining muscles...and grimacing faces. They have trained—for years. And they have disciplined themselves—for years. There's no way these athletes could endure such grueling preparation and agonizing exertion unless they had a grand goal in mind.

And, dear friend, our focus and perseverance should be like that of Olympic athletes as we look to the end of our race and focus on finishing well. The entry fee for competing—Christ's death (paid for us)—and the glorious prize that awaits us at the end are too priceless to trivialize by losing momentum, dropping behind, or failing to finish. So Paul, ever the exhorter, has a few more words for us on how to stay in the race. Read on!

***Philippians 3:15-16***

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

***Out of God's Word...***

1. Write out the first admonition Paul gives to his readers (verse 15).

Thinking back to our previous lesson, what is the "mind" Paul is referring to?

2. It's always wonderful to learn more about God and His character and how He works in our life. What do we learn about Him here (verse 15)?
3. Now write out Paul's second admonition to his readers (verse 16).

***...and into your heart***

- What words would you use to state Paul's admonition in verse 16?

In the positive? Do...

In the negative? Do not...

- What would you advise another Christian to do to press harder for Christian maturity?

And are you putting that same advice to work in your own pursuit of the goal? If not, what changes do you need to make or how can you increase the discipline needed to reach the goal?

## ***Heart Response***

Just two verses, beloved! But, oh what a powerful message! You see, our daily life as Christians is all about maturing in Christ. Paul was already “mature”...and yet he desired to continue moving forward in spiritual growth, to keep on reaching forward and pressing on, to keep on keeping on.

If you've come this far in our study of Paul's impassioned letter to the Philippians, I know that you, too, desire to grow in Christ, to develop a deeper love relationship with Him, to mature in understanding and usefulness. And so, I leave us with these fine words written by an eminent Greek scholar regarding these two verses packed with wisdom:

Paul says [these] things about pressing on toward maturity:

He is *forgetting the things which are behind*. That is to say, he will never glory in any of his achievements or use them as an excuse for relaxation. In effect Paul is saying that the Christian must forget all that he has done and remember only what he has still to do. In the Christian life there is no room for a person who desires to rest upon his laurels.

He is also *reaching out for the things which are in front*. The word he uses for *reaching out* is very vivid and is used of a racer going hard for the tape. It describes him with eyes for nothing but the goal. It describes the man who is going flat out for the finish. So Paul says that in the Christian life we must forget every past achievement and remember only the goal which lies ahead.

Paul pens verse 15 to mean this: “Anyone who has come to be mature in the faith and knows what Christianity is must recognize the discipline and the effort and the agony of the Christian life.” He may perhaps think differently, but, if he is an honest man, God will make it plain to him that he must never relax his effort or lower his standards but must press toward the goal until the end.

As Paul saw it, the Christian is the athlete of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

So press on, fellow athlete of Christ. “Let us not deviate from those principles that have brought us safely to our present state of Christian maturity. The condition for future [spiritual growth and maturity] is to walk according to present light.”<sup>17</sup>