

Pressing Toward the Mark

*I press toward the
mark for the prize
of the high calling
of God in Christ
Jesus.”*

—*Philippians 3:14*

THE APOSTLE PAUL WAS A

noble and very powerful example of one who had a clear, definite, and chief objective toward which he concentrated all of his energies. His de-

sire was to faithfully run the Christian racecourse in total consecration to his Heavenly Father. He did this with wholehearted sincerity and effort, that he might receive the most wonderful prize of the spiritual reward which he knew the Heavenly Father would give him in due time.

PRESSING FORWARD

In our key verse, Paul used the word ‘press’ to emphasize his intention to ‘pursue after,’ or to ‘run swiftly toward’ the goal of the High Calling in Christ Jesus. He used the word again, when he explained, “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”—vs. 12, *New American Standard Bible*

THE MARK

Paul said he was ‘pressing toward the mark’ of the ‘High Calling’ in Christ. The word ‘mark’ suggests a certain goal, or end view that he was striving to achieve. He put this in perspective in his letter to the brethren at Corinth, when he wrote, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—II Cor. 4:18

He explained, “We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Phil. 3:3) “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.”—vss. 7-12

THE PRIZE

The ‘prize’ that the apostle was striving for is the highest form of life—the divine nature. Our loving Heavenly Father has promised to give this reward

to all of the faithful class of Jesus' followers. The psalmist wrote, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Ps. 16:11) David said, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (chap. 17:15) In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul spoke of this great hope. "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life."—Rom. 2:7

Throughout the present Gospel Age, the overcoming class is being developed by the Holy Spirit of God, that they might be faithful in receiving the prize of the High Calling in Christ Jesus. These wonderful promises are outlined in the various messages that were given to the seven churches. To the church at Ephesus, we read, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." (Rev. 2:7) To the brethren at Smyrna, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." (vs. 11) To the Pergamos ecclesia, the promise is, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."—vs. 17

To the faithful brethren at Thyatira, our Lord promises, "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star." (vss. 26-28) To the church at Sardis, "He that overcometh, the same

shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”—chap. 3:5

To the Philadelphia church, we read, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.” (vs. 12) To those living at Laodicea, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—vs. 21

AN INCORRUPTIBLE CROWN

The apostle admonishes, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beatech the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.”—I Cor. 9:24-27

The apostle testified, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as

many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.”—Phil. 3:13-15

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul wrote, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”—Rom. 8:28-30

GIVING DILIGENCE

The Apostle Peter also spoke of the wonderful promises of God. “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”—II Pet. 1:3,4

He emphasized the importance of becoming well established in the Truth, and wrote, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.”—vss. 10-12

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM

Jesus encouraged his followers to greater heights of faithfulness by saying, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matt. 6:33) He led the way in doing those things that would be pleasing to the Heavenly Father. “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. 6:8-11

Jesus was never alive unto sin in the sense of being a sinner. He laid down his human life in sacrifice as a sin offering for Adam and his entire race. The apostle tells us that we should likewise reckon ourselves to be dead by reason of sin, laying down our little all on the altar of sacrifice. The prospective members of The Christ do not add anything to the ransom merit of Jesus, but we do share in his sacrificing experiences. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”—Rom. 6:3-5

A NOBLE EXAMPLE

Paul was not only a teacher who taught the Lord's people to seek first the kingdom, but he set

us a noble example. This is shown by his words to the church at Ephesus, when he said, "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) The strong ones should always be ready and willing to help the weaker ones. They have learned that the words of Jesus are true, and that those who have the Holy Spirit of love will receive a great blessing when they strive to help the weaker ones, and to carry their burdens.

AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

We are reminded of our responsibilities as brethren in Christ in the apostle's letter to the Corinthians. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." (II Cor. 5:20) An ambassador is an official and responsible representative of a particular government, and as such is expected to further the interests of the country that he represents. He is not expected to voice his own private opinions on sensitive matters, but he is obligated to carry out the policies and instructions of his government. He must avoid doing or saying anything that would cast a harmful reflection upon his country. In a similar way, the Lord's people are also ambassadors for Christ and we must remember who it is that we represent, and that our actions will often speak volumes. Therefore, it is important that we be careful to honor our loving Heavenly Father and our dear Lord, not only with our lips but also with our deeds.

When Jesus revealed himself to Saul on the road to Damascus, Saul asked, "What wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) His life experience was about to change abruptly, but in any event he was ready to serve the Lord. Our prayer each day to the Lord should also be a request that he show us what his will is for us, not only in the big things but also in the little everyday things of life.

Even when the Apostle Paul was in bonds he was well aware of his blessings and responsibilities toward the brethren and the Truth. He encourages, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."—Eph. 6:18-20

THE ARMOR OF GOD

The consecrated people of God are reminded of the trials and tests that are to develop them in the narrow way of sacrifice. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."—Eph. 6:10-12

In symbolic language, the Christian's armor consists of important safeguards that are necessary to overcome the temptations of the world, the

flesh, and the adversary. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”—vss. 13-17

The apostle has urged the followers of Jesus to study the Word of God, to meditate upon it, and to prepare our hearts and minds for the spiritual development of the New Creature in Christ Jesus. By doing so, we may be able to withstand every form of error or evil that is permitted to come upon us. He warns, however, that the conflict will be with Satan—the prince of darkness—and the wicked spirits that are associated with him.

Jesus spoke of this conflict, and said, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”—Luke 21:34-36

MATURITY

As we grow in maturity of Christian character, we have also learned to understand the various circumstances of life, and to appreciate the message

contained in the Lord's Word. When we falter the Lord may reprove us, but as we grow in grace and seek more carefully to judge ourselves, our mistakes should be fewer. We should rejoice as we find it easier to discern what the Lord's will is for us in each experience of life.

When we came into the light of present Truth and were begotten by the Holy Spirit, we have appreciated the fellowship of others "that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." (II Pet. 1:1) We should never lose our first love for the brethren as it could indicate a cooling off of the spirit of Christ.

John tells us, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."—I John 4:7-13

BEING PROVEN

The Apostle Paul gave wise counsel when he wrote, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou

also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."—Gal. 6:1-9

The children of God must develop the resiliency of meekness, cheerful endurance, and fortitude. This can only come by meeting the storms of life in the spirit of full obedience to God and with one purpose in mind—seeking first the kingdom of God. Only those who remain fully loyal will be victorious. May we also say, "None of these move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."—Acts 20:24

The Apostle Paul urges all the consecrated who are running in the race to bend every effort to win. He writes, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."—Heb. 12:1 ■