

## YOUTH COUNCIL PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2010

The **act of justification** assures the Christian of pardon from sin and acceptance with God. It is a work of grace which is wrought only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. It is a work which is perfect and complete and one in which the great Apostle Paul rejoiced.

The **work of sanctification** in the Christian's life (being made more and more conformed to the image/likeness of Christ) follows upon justification and is also of God's free grace. It is not something for which man can take credit, for it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. However it is accomplished in such a way that man himself is active and is responsible in the process.

**It is something which is a gradual and daily process and which will not reach perfections heights until Immanuel's Land. The Apostle Paul secure in his saving knowledge of Christ ever sought to his dying day to have a greater sanctifying knowledge of Christ. He never lost the desire to be more and more like the Saviour.**

As an aged saint he wrote to the Church at Philippi in the words of our text & said: - "I press toward the mark..." Even though he had come many years on his Christian pilgrimage – spiritual progress was still upper-most in his mind. He wanted to go further, to press onward, and to be more and more conformed to Christ in his walk & witness.

As an aged saint he wanted still to grow in grace and go forward in his experimental knowledge of Christ. He did not want to sit stationary or stand still in his Christian experience. Even though he was so mightily used of God he still desired to press onward. This was his sole ambition in life to press on with God.

Young person we have taken Paul's desire to "press toward the mark" as our theme in the Youth Council for 2010. Individually and collectively we ALL need to spiritually press on. Some did not make good progress in 2009. Others went back in their walk with God in the old year. Seemingly others have ground to a halt in their spiritual development.

In 2010 let us resolve by God's grace to spiritually progress. This is the whole objective of this year's programme of meetings and rallies. Standing still spiritually will only rob us of the blessing of God. To help us avert such a calamity I would like to consider the lessons to be learnt from Paul's desire to progress spiritually with God and apply them to our hearts and lives.

### **1STLY LET US LEARN FROM "THE EXPRESSION USED IN THE TEXT."**

Paul's desire for spiritual progress is expressed under the symbolism of the familiar ancient Greek foot-race. The expression which Paul uses comes from that which likens a Christian to a runner in a race.

They would have had in their minds the ancient Greek stadium with its course for foot races and surrounding it tiers of seats for spectators. The purpose of the race was to see who could reach the goal/mark opposite the entrance in the quickest time possible.

Near the entrance the contestants stripped for the race and took their assigned places on a stone threshold. Here the runners would have stood; body bent forward, one hand lightly touching the threshold awaiting the starting signal, which was the letting down of a cord which had been stretched in front of them.

At the signal they leapt forward and pressed towards the mark.

This was an expressive under-lying figure which was constantly used by Paul and would have been so well known to the readers of his day.

*1Tim 4:7 But refuse profane and old wives' fables, **and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.***

*2Tim 4:7 I have fought a good fight, **I have finished my course**, I have kept the faith:*

*1Co 9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? **So run, that ye may obtain.***

*Php 2:16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that **I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.***

*Heb 12:1 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***

This expression & these representative texts reminds us that a Christian cannot be a runner who merely holds his ground. One who is content with No progress! Merely running on the spot! The one who runs knows that with each footstep he nears the mark and the finishing line. There is progress, there is going on, there is a growing and developing in the things of God.

*Tell me young Christian are you on the track for God? Are you making progress in your spiritual development? If you cannot answer positively the expression that Paul uses in our text is to your condemnation rather than commendation. God wants you to make spiritual progress this year.*

**2NDLY LET US CONSIDER TOGETHER "THE EXAMPLE IN THE TEXT".**

**(a) Paul provides us with a good example of how we may assess our own progress in the things of God.**

His personal assessment is seen in that in **v13** he had made a calculation of his own heart's standing before God.

When the spiritual sum of his life was counted up Paul did not consider that he had crossed the line or had obtained the mark. Rather he was open and honestly lamented "I count not myself to have apprehended;"

*To make future progress some present heart honesty is required by all who profess the Lord's Name. When you calculate where you are with God today – what sort of spiritual total do you get? If you believe that you are spiritual enough – then you will not see any need to press on. Why go on, when you have already reached your goal?*

*Paul has left us a good example to follow as we need to carry out some spiritual stock taking & investigate where we are with God.*

**(b) Such self examination will deal with the scourge of self-complacency.**

When Paul looked at where he was spiritually with God he felt dissatisfied. Though he was vastly superior to any of us, for undoubtedly he was the greatest preacher of New Testament times, Paul did not feel satisfied with his spiritual attainments. Though he had come further than any of us in his spiritual development and sanctification he wanted to still go further.

*Spiritual self-complacency is a scourge to progress in the Christian life. There are many who profess the Lord's Name who really believe that they have come spiritually far enough and do NOT need to do anymore.*

*I fear there are some who are content spiritually with where they are – in contrast to Paul with what might represent the nominal minimum effort!! Privately their own devotions have been pared down to the bare minimum! At best a cursory glance at a verse of scripture, and a brief word of prayer each day to salve their consciences. Not for them the study of God's Word and the seeking of God in private in the closet. Publically they live clean but silently as family and friends perish all around about them and go out into hell. Their commitment to the work & worship of the local church is at best but one service a week. Young Christian I don't want any of you to ever sit comfortable with such spiritual complacency.*

*Others will certainly point to a higher level of commitment but do not want to add anything further to it. This is not the spirit of Paul – for he was more in labours & service than all other men but he still wanted to do something more.*

*I want to challenge you all FIND SOMETHING MORE TO DO THIS YEAR IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.*

- *Can you work amongst the Boys & Girls? Will you go and seek them out?*
- *Can you serve amongst the Youth?*
- *Can you visit and minister to the needs of the older generation?*
- *Can you increase your giving to the work of God?*
- *Can you make it to the place of prayer? (Younger Christian some of the older saints are not able to make it to the Prayer Meetings as regularly as once they did. Will you stand in the gap and make up the hedge for them?)*
- *Consider going on the Youth Council Outreaches this summer over to England or Wales. Make sure you take advantage of coming to the Youth Council Training Weekend. (Full details are found on the website)*

Paul's example of wanting to press on stops us from being content & complacent with where we are in our spiritual development & progress. There is no excuse for being self-complacent when we put our lives side by side with Phil 3 v 14. Don't be content with lower attainments when it is God who calls us to higher ground.

**3RDLY LET US CONSIDER "THE EXERTION THAT IS IN THE TEXT."**

**(a) In exerting himself Paul was totally focused.**

The word which is used in v 14 for "I press" is the same meaning as to pursue. This was his sole objective in life – remember his phrase in v 13 "this one thing I do". The pursuit of holiness, the progress of grace in his soul was the one chief ambition of Paul in life. Like the runner in the race Paul permitted nothing to distract him from being diverted from his goal. With all the physical, mental & spiritual powers which he possessed Paul exerted himself in order that he might make progress in sanctification.

*Be wary dear Christian of all of those things which would distract you from reaching the mark. Some have been way led by an over-emphasis on sport; on fashion; on physical appearance. None are wrong in and of themselves but they can be used to divert the individual from life's most important calling which is conformity to Christ.*

**(b) In order to avoid such Paul said he had to forget those things behind. Cf v 13**

Remember the picture of the runner in the race for this is to what Paul alludes. Looking back whilst running a race can be very dangerous. You may well trip and lose your footing. Irrespective you will lose time and direction and forfeit your place and thus lose the race.

*If you spend your time looking back you cannot expect to make progress. 2009 & the previous decade is over and gone. What has been done is done. Yesterday's blessings cannot suffice for lack of blessing today.*

*Charles Spurgeon once wrote: "What acclamations are heard when allusion is made to what our fathers did! Oh the name Carey, & Knibb, & Fuller! We Baptists think we have nothing to do now but to go upstairs & go to bed, for we have achieved eternal glory through the names of these good men. Thank God for them; they were grand men; but the right thing is to forget the past, and pray for another set of men to carry on the work. We should never be content, but, "On, on on," should continually be our cry."*

*May the Lord help us to put the past with all of its failures and successes behind us & press on to gain new ground for God?*

**(c) The personal cost involved is referred to in v 13 + 14.**

He is reaching forth – he is pressing onwards. The image is of the runner straining every nerve & muscle as he keeps on running with his hand outstretched to cross the finishing mark.

I never cease to be amazed at the endurance of the many runners which I see around the roads of Annalong and Mourne. They are out in all types of weather, training, building up their physical reserves, preparing for that all important race.

*Spiritually the analogy could not be any plainer – in making spiritual progress with God there has to be commitment & a willingness to pay the cost of going through with Him.*

**"The price is high, severe the test  
For those who would enjoy God's best;  
Surrender all, and then take the road  
With those who will go through with God."**

**FINALLY NOTICE "THE EXPECTATION IN THE TEXT – THE PRIZE"**

**(a) This can have a reference to a closer walk with God.**

That aspiring to spiritual perfection which Paul spoke of in the previous verses. We know that it will not be perfectly attained this side of eternity. Alas we have to acknowledge that reality. It will only be attained when we reach the heavenly Jerusalem. But that fact should NOT stop us ever seeking to progress with the Lord in our sanctification and holiness.

**Believer this is a prize worth seeking after in 2010. Do not stop where you are in the process. HOW CAN IT BE ACHIEVED?**

There is no one act or action through which it is achieved but it is achieved through the diligent usage of the **public & private means of grace**. Attending and adhering to the **preaching of God's Word**. Make much of the preached Word in 2010. There is also the **means of prayer**. We thank God that we are in praying church – join with others in your local church in the special times of intercession and calling upon the Lord's great name. Resolve to be faithful in your attendance in the place of prayer. There is also the **partaking of the public sacraments**. If you are not baptised this is an issue to put right with God in 2010. There is the regular partaking of the Lord's Supper – when the Church gathers to remember with thankfulness the place called Calvary, and where God imparts His grace afresh.

**Privately** make sure you are daily in the Book of God in 2010. Get a reading scheme which you can manage and stick with it which will take you right through the Bible. (These are already on this site) Privately plead and pray with God for the work. Have a prayer scheme to guide you through the week.

**We should be excited about the possibility of becoming more and more like our Saviour. This is a great prize to obtain.**

**(b) This can also have reference to an eternity spent with God.**

After this short sojourn is over – we are going to spend eternity in the place of many mansions. This is the eternal prize which is set before us today.

***Tell me is that the prize which is laid up for you? If you are not saved you have NO such hope! You need to repent of your sin and call upon the Lord for mercy & pardon, and then at the end of the life's journey you can claim the eternal prize.***

Believer press on, for we are only marking the start of 2010, but this is not where we want to stay. Spiritually we desire that this year would be one of great growth in our souls. When that process of sanctification would be quickened and when we are more and more conformed to the image of God's lovely Son. May we press onward toward the mark and claim the eternal prize through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.