

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#05-1116

Press On Toward The Goal #4

January 16, 2011

Before concluding this series, there is one matter that needs to be addressed dealing with the teaching by some that Paul was referring to a spiritual resurrection while he occupied a mortal body, not the bodily resurrection into immortality that comes after the mortal body undergoes corruption in the grave.

According to some, the spiritual resurrection is discovered with Paul's use of the word *perfect*, so let us consider how he used this word. In order to maintain continuity, verses 3:10-15 are presented.

(10) I long to know Christ and the power which is in His resurrection, and to share in His sufferings and die even as He died; (11) if by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the out-resurrection from among those who are dead. (Philippians 3:10 WNT; 3:11 WAET)

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect [teleioo], but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12 NASB)

(13) Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

Let us therefore, as many as are perfect [teleios], have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you... (Philippians 3:15 NASB)

In verse 12, Paul claimed that he had not become perfect, and then in verse 15 he claimed that others are perfect. How could this be? After all, if there was anyone in his day that was perfect, one would think that it had to be Paul. Was he being modest? Or, did he view himself less perfect than the other apostles? Reading how he defended himself to the Corinthians, I would say no on both counts.

To answer this seeming contradiction, we need to consider the Greek words used in these verses and how they are used elsewhere. In verse 12, the word *perfect* is the verb *teleioo*, which means "to complete, finish, fulfill, or perfect," or "to make a full end, consummation." In verse 15, the word *perfect* is the adjective *teleios*, which means "perfect, complete, or mature," or "that which has reached its end." It is translated in various ways to indicate "labor, growth, mental, and moral character." Both Greek words come from the root noun *telos*, which means "the end, literally of time or action." Keep in mind, we are dealing with a verb and an adjective and their meanings are very much alike. Context matters in understanding their use in scripture.

Verse 12 must be read in light of verse 11, and, in this context, Paul used *teleioo* to mean that he had not reached the full end of his life that would lead him to attaining to the *out-resurrection* that he sought. In other words, he had not reached his goal to receive the prize. Another way of stating it is that the process of being perfected had not been completed. At this point, he had not finished the course and won the race. He was still on the course, fighting the good fight, and keeping the faith. Simply, he had not reached the end.

He was not stating that he had not reached spiritual maturity or high moral character or some form of spiritual resurrection, as some teach. I do not believe that this is the meaning of verse 12 because it is joined with verse 11 and the goal of the *out-resurrection*: **Not that I have already obtained it.**

In verses 10-11, the word *resurrection* forms two bookends: the power of His resurrection and the *out-resurrection*. To claim that resurrection is some type of spiritual resurrection makes no sense. Paul referred to it as His (Jesus') resurrection, and Jesus did not have a spiritual resurrection; He had a

bodily resurrection. Yes, He was resurrected into a spiritual body, but this is what resurrection is all about: putting off the mortal and putting on immortality. Paul sought a spiritual, glorified, celestial body in the image of his Lord.

To believe that two different types of resurrections are somehow in view for Paul in these verses defies logic and his teaching. Paul was logical in the presentation of his evangel. He pressed on, for his end had not come. He knew that his perfection would come when Jesus transforms **the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory**.

To add a little more proof to this, consider that Jesus said: **"The third day I am perfected** [teleioo]" (Luke 13:32 ASV). Obviously, the third day is an inference to the day of His resurrection, also the day of His perfection. In what is called His priestly prayer to His Father before He went to the cross, Jesus said: **"I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished** [teleioo; completed, perfected] **the work which You have given Me to do"** (John 17:4 NASB). Paul made a similar statement regarding his desire to complete or **finish** [teleioo] **my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus** (Acts 20:24). Finally, Hebrews 5:9-10 refers to Jesus as **having been made perfect** [teleioo] **and becoming the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek**. He became the source of salvation because He died for the sin of the world and was **resurrected from among the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness** (Romans 1:4). He was made perfect by learning obedience from the things which He suffered, but He was perfected in His death and resurrection. **For by one offering He has perfected** [teleioo] **for all time those who are sanctified**. (Hebrews 10:14 NASB)

Let us be clear that there is an ultimate perfection that comes with the *out*-resurrection, but, in verse 15, Paul also referred to being perfect in this life: **Let us therefore, as many as are perfect** [teleios], **have this attitude**. It is untenable to think that Paul did not include himself in this group, for he went on to tell the Philippians to follow his example.

So, what did Paul mean by his use of the word *perfect* in this verse? He meant maturity, a maturity of character and morals, that is, spiritual maturity. Paul desired that all who are in Christ be **spiritual men**, that is, spiritually mature, not immature infants (1 Corinthians 3:1). Paul made this clear.

We do speak wisdom among those who are mature [among the perfect] [teleios]... (1 Corinthians 2:6 NASB [LITV])

We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete [perfect] [teleios] **in Christ**. (Colossians 1:28 NASB [KJV])

Let us press on to maturity [perfection] [teleiotes; derived from teleios]... (Hebrews 6:1 NASB [KJV])

For this purpose also I labor, striving, according to His power. ... Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man [a perfect man] [teleios] (Colossians 1:29; Ephesians 4:13 NASB [KJV])

Maturity in this life speaks of knowing God's purpose and plan and living an obedient, holy life with this in view. Just as we are exhorted: **"You shall be holy, for I am holy,"** so are we exhorted: **"Therefore you are to be perfect** [teleios], **as your heavenly Father is perfect** [teleios] (Matthew 5:48 NASB). This speaks of maturity manifested in righteous, moral character.

However, as long we occupy mortal bodies where sin dwells, we will not be fully perfected into the image of our beloved Lord Jesus. We need a new body, but let us seek for it in the better resurrection!

(35) So that they might obtain a better resurrection... (39) And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40) because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect [teleios]. (Hebrews 11:35, 39-40 NASB)

Let us strive like Paul and press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus so that we too will be made perfect in the *out*-resurrection.