

**A Perfect Resolution**  
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Introduction –This will be the last sermon that I ever preach in this pulpit...this year.

There is something about the start of a New Year. We have lived another year of life. We have lived through another year of trials, and we have learned another year of lessons from the victories and defeats. We have a point in time coming this week, that, at the click of a second hand on the clock, one year will be gone never to be recovered or lived again and another year will start that is just as unique.

We have come to the part of the year where we begin to take stock of things. We begin to look at the things that we have accomplished over the past year, and the blessings that we have received from God and friends.

We may also look back and see times where we failed. Maybe we failed to accomplish last year's goals. Maybe we failed in other areas that are areas we need to work on. Whatever the case may be, many of us will make a solemn vow for the coming year, we will make a resolution that this year we will do things differently. We will make a New Year's Resolution.

Some of us, won't bother with making a New Year's Resolution at all. We can look back and see the long line of our own and other people's failures. The people who go to the gym regularly have learned to go as little as possible in the first few months of the year because it will be crowded with people who have made a resolution to be healthier.

Garage sales are full of "like new" items from broken resolutions. Go to a garage sale and you will find that treadmill that was supposed to help someone as they walked their way to a better heart, that work out video that was supposed to make someone look like a Hollywood action hero, self-help books that were going to make someone rich and enjoy life to the fullest, games that were going to help some family spend more time together.

However, not all resolutions fail. Just because we have failed in the past doesn't mean that we should stop trying or even that we won't succeed in the future.

Now, if you want to lose weight this year, I'll refer you to Nutri-system, or Atkins, or maybe Jenny Craig. If you want to get in shape you can get that treadmill, gym membership, or any

number of workout DVDs. If you want to do better with your money, look up Dave Ramsey or John Cummuta. If you want a closer relationship with Jesus Christ then listen closely for the next 2 hours...

Paul was the “Apostle to the Gentiles” according to Romans 11:13. Paul was the writer of 13 (possibly even 14 if you count Hebrews) of the 27 books of the New Testament. If you open your Bible, you will find Paul’s letters starting with Roman’s and ending with Philemon (or Hebrews)

Paul gave everything he had up to and including his own life in the service of Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 3:13-14 Paul tells us

**Philippians 3:13** *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,*

**Philippians 3:14** *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

In this passage we find 3 building blocks for the perfect New Year’s Resolution for a closer relationship to Christ.

First, you must take stock of yourself. Second, there are certain things you should forget, and third, you should Reach Forward toward the goal.

I. Figure out where you stand.

You can't move forward unless you understand where you are. If you are going to lose weight, you've got to weigh yourself no matter how painful that may be otherwise you won't know if you have made any progress later. If you're going to have a closer relationship with Jesus, you must be willing to honestly assess where you stand with him now. Without an honest assessment of where you are you won't know where you are going.

Many people seem to be happy with their relationship with Christ. They don't feel any need to work on it.

The Bible tells us in Phillipians 2:12 to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling". When you place your trust in Jesus Christ as your savior you are saved from hell and bound for heaven from that moment on. You don't work your way into heaven, but, even though you are saved, that doesn't mean that the learning or good works don't need to happen. It's kind of like getting a brand new bicycle that is still in the box. All of the parts are there, but

you need to put it together in order to enjoy it. I think that's over simplified but you get my point.

The point is that once you are saved, the learning and growing have only just begun. You are born again, and as a newborn, you should begin to grow in "knowledge and grace" as Peter says in

**2 Peter 3:18** *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

Paul said "I count not myself to have apprehended". He said that he hadn't apprehended or reached his goal.

Paul gave up everything to serve Christ yet he didn't feel close enough to Jesus.

If we look around and compare ourselves to those around us, we may feel adequate as a Christian. After all, hey, I'm in church and those other people aren't.

If we compare ourselves among ourselves we might not do so badly. But stand next to Paul as he recounts the things that he has suffered for Christ.

**2 Corinthians 11:23** *Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more*

abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

**2 Corinthians 11:24** Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one.

**2 Corinthians 11:25** Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

**2 Corinthians 11:26** *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren;

**2 Corinthians 11:27** In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

**2 Corinthians 11:28** Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

**2 Corinthians 11:29** Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

**2 Corinthians 11:30** If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

Can we even hold a candle next to this man who was used of God.

Even after 27 years of being saved and being in the ministry he still wrote in Romans 7

**Romans 7:18** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not.

**Romans 7:19** For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

**Romans 7:20** Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

He was still fighting a battle between his flesh and his spirit. If you don't know about that battle then you haven't even begun to fight it.

Paul took a close look at his walk and said "I count not myself to have apprehended"

Many are content to put time with God on a schedule that involves church activities and Sunday Services.

As long as it doesn't mess with their schedule too much. Like the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation chapter 3 they are neither hot nor cold, they are lukewarm. They say "I am rich and increased of goods and have need of nothing."

How many of us will take a closer look at ourselves and examine ourselves and ask God to show us where we fall short.

It is a painful mirror to look into but it is well worth the time, the prayer, and the pain, because; once you see where you fall short, you will be willing to let God help you to overcome.

Once we know where we stand with God and have realized the need to build on our relationship with him, there are certain things that we need to forget.

## II. Forgetting those things which are behind

### A. Forgetting your specialty

When Paul was saved he brought a lot to the table. He tells us in the beginning of Philippians 3

**Philippians 3:4** Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

**Philippians 3:5** Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

**Philippians 3:6** Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Now, Paul was a man God could use right? I mean, he knew God's law forwards and back. He was a Hebrew born of the tribe of Benjamin, he showed plenty of Zeal for God when he persecuted the church and he not only knew the law but he obeyed it to the letter.

Read on to see what Paul thought of all this.

**Philippians 3:7** But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

**Philippians 3:8** 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,

Paul counted them as dung. Do I need to modernize that word for you? When he looked at all of his past experience it didn't mean any more to him than something in a cow pasture that you might step in. The things that used to mean something meant nothing to him. He was willing to count them as a loss.

When people get saved and become a part of the church, they often have talents and abilities that they have cultivated in the world. Just because you can do something, doesn't automatically mean that God will use it.

Just because you can sing or play an instrument doesn't mean that God wants you in front of everyone else leading the congregation in singing. You may be an excellent teacher but that doesn't mean you should be teaching Sunday school the day after you're saved.

You may be able to craft a sermon and speak beautifully but that doesn't make you a preacher.

Paul told the Corinthians

**1 Corinthians 2:1** And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

Billy Sunday was a professional baseball player when he got saved but he didn't go off and start a baseball ministry. He left it behind, counted it as a loss and became one of the greatest evangelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I've said this before but I'll say it again. If you want to know if someone is doing a ministry in the church for the right reasons, take that ministry away from them. If they pick up their ball and go home, then you know they were only there for the ministry. If they keep showing up and listening to the preaching and participating when they get the chance then you know they were there for the right reason.

I've worked in the sound booth for almost 5 years now. We had a man that played rhythm guitar when we had 5 guitars on stage. When they asked him to sit out, he sat out, when they asked if he could play drums, he learned to play drums, when we needed someone on

keyboard, he learned the keyboard. He never got mad, he never picked up his guitar and went home, he simply filled in wherever he was needed and sat in the congregation when he wasn't needed. He led the nursing home ministry rain or shine, with help or without. Going to one of 5 different nursing homes each Sunday. Was he the best player up there? Not by any stretch but he was faithful and he was there for the right reasons and that's the people that God can use.

I've heard people sing that couldn't make it through a 5<sup>th</sup> grade choir audition but their heart was right and God used them to move people to shouts of joy and rejoicing.

### B. Forgetting your Hurts

On any given day, someone is going to get their feelings hurt. You may be the one hurting someone else's feelings or you may be the one whose feeling get hurt.

When Paul listed the sufferings that he has gone through,

**2 Corinthians 11:23** Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

**2 Corinthians 11:24** Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one.

**2 Corinthians 11:25** Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

He said that he had received 39 stripes with a whip 5 times (or 195 stripes) by the Jews and the he was beaten with rods 3 times and stoned once.

Listen to what Paul had to say about the Jews

**Romans 10:1** Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

**Romans 9:1** I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

**Romans 9:2** That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.

**Romans 9:3** For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

**Romans 9:4** Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service *of God*, and the promises;

Paul was willing to give up Christ if it meant that the Jewish nation could be saved.

Paul also had some things that he had to let go of.

**Acts 26:9** I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

**Acts 26:10** Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against *them*.

**Acts 26:11** And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted *them* even unto strange cities.

Paul had persecuted many Christians before he was saved.

The Bible says in Acts 8:3 that he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, taking men and women and putting them in prison.

I can only imagine the memories that must have haunted him. Images like that burn into your mind and last a lifetime. The tears and blood that was shed because of him. The people that he hurt, the lives that were torn because of him. All the time thinking that he was doing God a favor and all the time, he was fighting against God.

The book of Acts says that he held the coats of the men who threw the stones that killed Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Paul said that he was “forgetting those things which are behind”. This doesn’t mean that we can hurt people and move on and that doesn’t mean that he was able to forget everything.

The Bible tells us that we should seek forgiveness, but we can’t let the past paralyze us. If we’ve been hurt in the past, we can’t let others stop us from growing in our walk with Christ.

We should continue to learn and strive to do the best job we can as we exist in this world.

The Bible says

**1 Timothy 5:8** But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

But, we can’t put too much stock in our own abilities and talents when it comes to serving God. If we do, then we’re putting God in a box and saying “Lord, this is how I’m going to let you use me.”

Once you Figure out where you stand in your relationship to God, and you realize some of the things that you should Forget that have been holding you back, It’s time to reach Forward.

### III. Reaching Forward

**Philippians 3:13** 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, **Philippians 3:14** I **press toward the mark** for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

We know that Paul was saved when he was on the road to Damascus. He literally saw the light. We know that once you are saved, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit and that when you die, you will go to heaven when you die. Not maybe but will.

Paul was reaching toward that blessed day when we will all stand before Jesus and our works shall be tried.

**1 Corinthians 3:11** For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

**1 Corinthians 3:12** Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

**1 Corinthians 3:13** Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

**1 Corinthians 3:14** If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

**1 Corinthians 3:15** If any man's work shall be

burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Jesus laid the foundation when he gave his life on the cross for our sins. As we live our lives we begin to build on the foundation that he has laid for us. Many Christians are going to lay their works on there and find out that they were wood, hay, and stubble. That's the stuff that burns up in the fire.

When we stand before Jesus on that day and he says okay, let's lay out your works and see them. "Well Lord, I wrote a really cool song for you", and the fire burns and poof, nothing left. "I went to church and listened to the preaching" poof gone The fire burns and a nothing is left behind. "I used my beautiful voice in the church choir and everyone loved it." Poof nothing. Work after work will be laid down and the fire will burn them up until finally, the Christian stands there staring at a heap of ashes that used to be stuff that they thought meant something. They are still saved but they have brought nothing to their Lord and savior.

Another Christian walks up and humbly he lays his works down...

. "I led these people to you Lord and they got saved." Poof and there are crowns where there was fire.

**Matthew 25:21** His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Paul looked at it as a race.

**1 Corinthians 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.

**1 Corinthians 9:25** 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.

Picture this race. You have exercised yourself, learning God's word and have trained constantly. When you line up at the starting line, you see the runners next to you. Pride is on your left, and Gossip is on your right. Next to Gossip is gluttony (the one the fat preachers don't like to hit on). Name your sins and you will name your runners. You start down the trail and immediately pass Pride, you have no problems overcoming him. Up ahead you see Gossip, you have to be careful, watch your footing, you close in on her (of course Gossip is a girl, if you don't like it tell it your own way later), and then you pass her. Soon one by one you pass them. Off in the distance you can see someone else running their own race. They have passed quite a few runners but they look back and soon the Pride on their track

overtakes them. You don't dare look back because you could be overtaken by Besetting Sin.

As Paul said, they do it for a corruptible crown, but we do it for an incorruptible crown.

**Hebrews 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,

## **Conclusion**

In order to take on this New Year's challenge you must

- I. Ask God to show you where you stand. "Lord, show me where I fall short."

It may be that you haven't even taken the first step of placing your trust in Jesus Christ. If you would like to know more about having a relationship with God the father through God the Son come down and ask. Don't worry about anyone seeing, don't let anything stop you from finding out about that relationship.

- II. Forget those things in the past that are holding you back, it may be pride in what you've accomplished in the past, or it may be that you have hurt someone, or someone has hurt you. Don't let those things stop you in your fellowship with Christ.
- III. Reach Forth and Press toward the Mark of the Prize of the High calling of Christ Jesus. It is the highest, greatest calling that you will ever receive.

Paul said "This one thing I do." He did all kinds of things in life, he was a tent maker, he was a missionary, he was a church planter, he preached, he taught, and he witnessed. All of these things were a part of his one goal pleasing of pleasing his Lord and Savior and hearing on that day "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." "Enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

**Colossians 3:23** *And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;*

**Colossians 3:24** *Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.*

The beauty and perfection of this New Year's Resolution is that the goal itself is perfection.

We won't be perfect or complete in this lifetime but we won't be wasting our time if we strive to be more like Christ.

Paul was never content with what he had accomplished. He was always looking to the future and what God would have him to do next. Even when he looked back and told others what had happened in his life it was only to give them a testimony.

We should never be satisfied in our relationship with Jesus.