January 27, 2013

ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

STAND FIRM

MINISTRY INVOCATION

“Almighty God: Our existence is predicated on Your Love for us and for that we are humbled as well as blessed. There is No One greater than You. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW AND UNDERSTAND

Maintaining a strong relationship with Christ now prepares us for the relationship that we will have with Christ in eternity; Jesus stressed that planning and being prepared will help people reach important goals.

THE APPLIED FULL GOSPEL DISTINCTIVE

We believe in the indwelling of the Holy Ghost for all believers and that the Holy Ghost verifies and validates the Believer as part of the Body of Christ.

TEXT:

Background Scripture – Philippians 3:12-4:1
Key Verse – Philippians 3:16
Lesson Scripture – Philippians 3:12-16 (NKJV)
Philiipians 3:12–16 (NKJV)

Pressing Toward the Goal

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

15 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. 16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

COMMENTARY
Paul’s attention turned to true zeal in living the Christian life. He continued his argument against his Jewish opponents through his personal experience. What should occupy the thoughts and focus the energy of genuine Christians?

The passage falls into two distinct parts. First, in 3:12–14, Paul expressed his desire to achieve what God had in store for him. Then, in 3:15–16 he issued a call to follow his pattern of living. Paul was in the process of achieving. In case he was misunderstood in 3:4–11, he clarified that he had not yet arrived. One of the key words of the passage is “pursue.” It stresses an active commitment to the call of Christ.

Some commentators suggest that in this section Paul addressed his opponents. They say that he consciously countered a perfectionist group, sometimes called “divine men,” who claimed their own completeness. Others suggest that Paul produced this section because the Jewish opponents of 3:2 taught that perfection could be achieved by keeping the law. Still others see Paul continuing the logic of 3:4–11, issuing a warning because of a tendency to misunderstand his teaching. His introduction of 3:15 with the words “all of us who are mature,” however, suggests that there may have been some irony in his tone. The context does not require an opponent, and it is unlikely that he envisioned one. A group within the church may have misunderstood his teaching on justification and taken it to their own “logical” conclusions, which were theologically unacceptable.

Paul’s Desire to Fulfill His Call (3:12–14)

3:12–13a Twice, in similar terms, Paul expressed his imperfection. The first expression presents this in three ways (v. 12), and the second expression summarizes the three ways into one (v. 13). The three are: “Not that I have already obtained,” “have already been made perfect,” and “I press on.” The basic question is, What did Paul lack and, therefore, seek? Three times the word root for “received” occurs (3:12).

The precise definition may refer to mental or experiential attainment. Used of the mind, it means to understand (or understand fully). This would mean that Paul did not yet understand the significance of Christ or that he did not know him completely. Paul stated that he did not yet have in hand what he desired.

What did Paul hope to attain? In these verses two phrases suggest an answer: “have already been made perfect” and “Christ Jesus took hold of me.” Paul had not yet achieved completion. The question is whether Paul referred to a perfect knowledge or experience. Was his call to a complete knowledge of Christ or to a complete identification with him in character?

That knowledge involved knowing Christ’s power and suffering. Because that knowledge was related closely to experience, clearly he wanted to know in
his experience the full implications of his union with Christ. It seems best, therefore, to understand Paul as saying he had not completed the experiential process begun in his salvation. He looked forward to the resurrection from the dead and, secondarily, to the process of conformity to death which would bring it forth.

First, it easily explains why Paul had not attained. He looked to the end of time when the resurrection would occur. Second, it is helpful to remember that a first-century heresy stated that the resurrection was already past. Something similar may have concerned Paul here when he pointedly affirmed the necessity of continued growth. Third, this fits well with Paul’s prayer in 1:9–11. He hoped to be pure and blameless at the day of Christ. Fourth, the idea of “the power of the resurrection” (v. 10) must be taken with the death that precedes it. Thus the thought of conformity to the will of God (“becoming like him in his death,” v. 10) continued to be a goal because resurrection power is available in death. Paul looked ahead to the completion of his salvation.

3:13b–14 The content of Paul’s goal is given. Repeating the word “press on” of v. 12, Paul employed athletic imagery to make his point. The manner of attainment is explained by two participles. First, “forgetting what is behind” comprehensively expresses Paul’s future orientation. What was done was done! Both the nostalgia of the former life and the “good ole days” of his Christian life would paralyze him in terms of what God wanted in the future. Every day was a new adventure. Second, he was “straining toward what is ahead.” Both mental and physical discipline were necessary.

The goal is the heavenward call of Jesus Christ. For Paul, it was probably the model provided in Christ who demonstrated both obedience unto death and the resurrection. The prize is explained as the heavenward call. The translation seems to make the call at the beginning of the race, however, rather than the end. That corresponds to Paul’s life if the call is understood as at the time of conversion. It seems best to take it as the call associated with the resurrection. At that day, there will be a call to heaven. Further, in 3:21, Paul mentioned the resurrection and the transformation that will occur then. He lived for the day when the heavenward call would come, like a victory in a race. Rather than slack off, as some were prone to do, the thought of it motivated him to further purity and service. He would get to know every dimension of Christ (reign and suffering), through every means. The joy of the process kept him going, but he realized that the ultimate joy was the completion of God’s work in his life.

*Paul’s Encouragement to Other Believers (3:15–16)*
Paul came to his point at the end of this section. His experience correctly set a pattern for all believers. If they would understand it and join with him, they would avoid the influence of the false teachers.

3:15a First, Paul called the Philippians to unity. The words “take such a view of things” use the verb “be minded” which characterized 2:1–11. The word includes both thoughts and values. The church was to value these truths as Paul did. He called the believers “mature”, but in light of the relative infrequency of the word as a description of persons, questions arise. Paul could have been speaking in irony, addressing a group of people who assumed they were perfect. If so, he was calling them to admit their imperfect knowledge about such matters and accept his evaluation.

3:15b Second, Paul warned about misconduct. The interpretation depends in part on knowing who Paul addressed. It could have been a correction to the false teachers or instructions to mature Christians. Paul did address the mature and realized that God would work in them. Further, his words were corrective, i.e., that God would correct their wrong attitudes in the course of time. Their misunderstanding involved their perfectionist ideas, which had reached a deep level of personal commitment, evidenced by Paul’s use of the term “think differently.”

3:16 Third, Paul gave an exhortation. The believers were to remain steadfast. What they achieved to this point was to guide them into the future as the standard by which they would walk collectively. Generally it means an orderly walk or a disciplined walk. It has overtones of a collective discipline, of all walking in the same row or by the same measure. Two emphases appear in this sentence. First, they were to remain true to what they had. Second, they were to remain true with a collective discipline that was to characterize the entire church. This meant that they would not follow the infatuating teachings of Paul’s opponents, and it also meant that they would seek to implement in their own lives what they already knew to do. That included knowing Christ and looking forward to the resurrection.

The last sentence summarizes this section by presenting a challenge to continue in the faith. Obviously some believers had tendencies toward deviating from what they had learned from Paul. In rebuking the false teachers, Paul presented his own testimony and urged the group at large to have the same attitude. While the exhortation related primarily to 3:12–16, it ended Paul’s first line of apology against his opponents. It also placed faith in the church members’ attitudes and ability to continue in the things they had learned.

RELATED DISCUSSION TOPICS
CLOSING PRAYER
My God: I am grateful to have found You and kept You in the forefront of my being. Bless us continually with Your grace and mercy. They represent bountiful blessings for all of us. Amen.