

Fight for Your Future
Sermon October 1, 2017

God's children are constantly changing and growing. Our Lord Jesus Christ often said, in many ways, that if you want to grow, you have to change. At one point, He compared us to a seed, and He said that we are like seeds, but we have to change and grow into a big tree, then we have to bring not only leaves but also fruit to feed others.

In our golden verse, the apostle Paul compares the Christians to an athlete, a runner participating in a race. Paul, as an athlete, wants to reach the finish line, and for this he is not walking but he is running as fast as he can, focusing on his final goal. Paul says that "In the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules." (2 Timothy 2:5)

We have heard that many people's goal was to climb the Himalayas. Amongst climbers, many saw skeletons on their way, those people's remains who died during their climbing because somehow they were not perfectly well prepared to reach their goals, and did not follow perfectly the rules.

Our final line, the goal, is to reach the gates, which will enter us into God's heavenly glory. In order to reach the gates, we have to follow perfectly the rules. We have to see the finish line. We have to keep the rules.

Today, our Lord wants to prepare us for our Christian journey, sharing with us four short but very important personal messages:

1. I am not perfect;
2. don't look back;
3. focus on your future; and
4. try to be perfect.

1. I Am Not Perfect!

Dear beloved, I have to realize, day by day, that I am not perfect.

Which in this case means that:

- I don't see the finish line clearly
- I don't follow the rules of an athlete (runner)
- I don't invest all my energy to finish the race as an athlete

You should realize, also, that you are not perfect either. You have to judge your present situation in a very honest way to see if you fight in a fair way to reach the finish line or not.

Paul took a look into the mirror, because he was interested to see exactly who he was and what kind of thoughts, feelings, and dreams he had in his heart. Facing with reality what he saw in the mirror, Paul said: “I don’t think I am at the finish line yet”, which means that I don’t think I am perfect yet, which means that in many ways I don’t follow God’s rules, and I still make mistakes.

He was not indifferent about himself and this is why he looked into the mirror; this is why he wanted to discover again how he looks from inside.

If we don’t care how we look from inside, what is in our heart, if we don’t care about our mistakes, our thoughts, feelings and dreams which are influencing our actions, that means we don’t care about our present and our future, and for this, in the future, we will pay a horrible price. For this, time to time, we have to take a look into the mirror to see who we are, who we became and what is in in our hearts, what kind of mistakes we make.

After Paul made an inventory, he was not happy with himself. He said:

- I make a lot of mistakes.
- I do know what I should do but I don’t have strength to do everything is the best way.
- My spirit and my mind are ready, but my body is weak.

But who was Paul?

- He was God’s chosen servant.
- He offered his whole life for the Lord’s service.
- God did so many marvelous things through him.
- He was much closer to God than you and me.

At the end of his inventory, he says:

- I am not enough.
- I did not do enough.

Often I hear people saying:

- I did enough for this church and I don’t want to do anything more.
- I did enough for my children and now they are on their own.

- I know enough about God and the Bible, and I don't have to go to the church.
- I prayed enough and I don't have to pray more.
- I made a lot of changes in my life, so nobody can ask or force me to make more changes.

If a person is satisfied with himself, the person won't struggle to be more, to go further, but will STOP on his journey. For this reason, God's spirit wants to show us that we are not perfect, not complete, and this is how God is encouraging us, not to stop but to make more changes in our lives.

2. Don't Look Back!

Things which happened in the past, have to be put in the right place: I have to forget them. Paul was a runner and he struggled to reach the FINISH line. He was able to do good things in the past, but he did not stop to think about them. He said: "Yes, with God's help, I did something good. Praise the Lord. Now let's see what else I can do." He passed so many other people and left them behind him. He had no temptation to look back again and again to revisit his good actions to see how many people were behind him, and how much better he was than others. He did not have the temptation to compare himself with those who were behind him to see how much better and stronger he was than those who were behind him. He knew that, looking back and comparing himself with others behind him, he would lose his power and he would slow down. He was not focusing on the past, but on his future, which was in front of him.

We have a temptation to remind ourselves and others about the good things we did so far for others. We like to glorify our actions. In those moments, we look back and we start to love ourselves, saying: "What a great person I am." If we are overly satisfied with our actions, we slow down as runners, and we are not focusing on our future and on the finish line.

We have another temptation as athletes/runners. I often can hear even Christians comparing themselves to others saying: "I am not a murderer." "I don't commit adultery." "I don't steal." "I am not like those who are in jail." Why would you compare yourselves with murders and thieves? Why don't you compare yourself with Christ?

We should be thankful for what we did in God's name, but we should not focus on our actions and count our good deeds, because in that case we would take our focus off the finish line.

3. Focus on Your Future!

We all have to focus on a glorious future, which is in front of us. The runner uses both of his legs and synchronizes them, using his two hands which are before his legs, and using his mind and vision which are way ahead of him.

We, as God's children, have to behave like this. We have to have a desire to move forward, to reach out for something more than we already have in a spiritual way. We cannot dwell on what we already have or what we are, but we have to have great ambitions to be more perfect. Our mind and our spirit have to be in front of our body. Our spirit has to control our body. Otherwise our body and our temptations will take us offside from the finish line.

4. Try to Be Perfect!

Our constant question has to be: Am I already like Christ? If you are not, then you cannot stop on your journey. Jesus said: "Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

If you are a Christian, and you love your Lord Jesus Christ, who died for you on the cross, then your goal has to be 'to be perfect'. If you give up on being perfect, then your measurements and goals are lower than God expects from you. If we don't struggle to be perfect, then we have the temptation to prepare a much lower scale for our goals. In this way, we easily reach the point when we say: I am good enough. If I think I am good enough, I don't have to struggle to be a better person.

Please don't say that you don't have the strength to be much better than you are. Just ask God for strength. God will never run out of power to help you. Love Him and trust in Him. He can lead you day by day, and He wants to give you strength to change.

There is a valid question: Can any human being on this earth reach the point when they can say that they are PERFECT? NO! Not at all. But there are millions and millions who reached that point when they were declared by God to be PERFECT. They are already at the throne of God, because they were fighting the good fight with a good conscience, they were struggling day by day to be perfect and to do

their best, and for this, they were praised by God, purified by the blood of Christ who made them PERFECT.

If you fight with the good fight and you try to do your very best to change in a better way, our Lord Jesus Christ will do His very best to make you perfect for that very last moment, when you will be called to God's throne, where you and I will be measured by our deeds and actions.

Now, we still have thousands of temptations and obstacles in our lives, we can get tired, but with God's help we can be re-energized. At the final line, God's precious gift is waiting for those who kept the faith, who were fighting the good fight.

As Paul says: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8) Amen