

Going For the Gold!

The apostle Paul once said: Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run your race that you may lay hold of the prize and make it your own. Now every athlete who goes into training conducts himself temperately and restricts himself in all things. They do it to win a wreath that will soon wither, but we do it to receive a crown of eternal blessedness (I Cor. 9:24-25).

by Jim Rector

This quotation of Paul from I Corinthians 9 is very telling, in that the apostle compares the Christian calling to that of an Olympic athlete. He uses such words as *race*, *run*, *prize*, *training*, all of which connote a certain emphasis in this passage on true believers reckoning themselves to be in a great athletic struggle of sorts.

The language of these verses strongly suggests, no even supports, the concepts of *movement*, *preparation*, *action*,

effort, *striving*, and *victory*. Is there indeed an element of outright energy and focused purpose involved in the calling God has put upon the lives of His people?

IS MORE THAN JUST BELIEVING REQUIRED?

You can always guarantee a loud, protracted, and sometimes outright vociferous debate, if someone asks the question, *Is more than just believing required?* I

want to start by answering this question, so that no one mistakes the place from which I am coming in this discussion.

Is more than just believing required? When I am asked that question, I almost always am able to sense that the person asking it already has a preconceived answer or notion with regard to the inquiry, and so often I will simply say to the individual, *Are you sure that is the right question?* It usually gets most questioners' attention and gives them at least

some pause for thought. And that really is what is needed when this subject is considered.

The two sides of this issue are fairly clearly delineated. On the one hand, you have those who maintain that Christ did it all for us, so belief is all that is required. On the other hand, however, you will find a highly vocal element who contend that each believer plays a major part in what God is doing, and that all sorts of rules and restrictions need to be in place in someone's life before they can be in God's good graces.

I am starting our study with this issue, because I am going to be making some very definitive statements with regard to what part individual believers play or can play in God's scheme of things. From the outset I want to establish the unequivocal fact that I believe and indeed champion what Paul told the Ephesians when he said:

“And you He made alive, when you were already dead in your sins...So rich is He in His mercy! In order to satisfy the wonderful love with which He loved us. Even when we were slain by our own shortcomings, He made us alive together in fellowship with Christ--He gave us the very life of Christ Himself...for it is by grace that you are saved. And He has raised us up together with Him and made us sit down with Him in the heavenly sphere. He did this that He might clearly demonstrate through the ages to come the immeasurable riches of His free grace and His goodness of heart toward us in Christ

Jesus. For it is by free grace that you are saved through faith. And this salvation is not of yourselves or of your own doing, but it is the gift of God; not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are God's own handiwork” (Eph. 2:1, 4-10).

It goes without saying that there is stark division over the meaning of these words, even though Paul seems to be quite straightforward in what He says. I have come to believe that one of the more difficult things for human beings to really accept is that God loves them so much, even before they ever knew Him or were even born, that He has been willing to offer them eternal salvation as a free gift.

For many this simply cuts against the grain of human nature. The feelings of shame, guilt, and unworthiness dog the heels of countless millions who inhabit this planet. Out of that group God has called some, but their reluctance to let go of their old mind-set precludes, or at least greatly inhibits, His ability to work in and through them as He desires. For people of this background and persuasion, only one thing will do. The only way that they feel they can receive anything good from God is if they are able to work it out on their own. In that way, they can pay for their own guilt and unworthiness, and only then can they act confidently in the faith. Otherwise, they remained stuck in the land of the *undeserving*. And so when they hear anyone read Paul's clear words in Ephesians 2,

why the very hair on their necks bristle, and they begin reaching for some weapon with which to commence warfare--because *them is fighting words!!*

All levity aside, this is a serious issue. I personally believe that salvation is an absolutely free gift of God, given because of Who and what He is, because of His perfect divine nature of love and goodness, and having nothing whatsoever to do with who we are or what we have done. Paul takes special pains insure that the reader understands this fact. He expressly brings up the subject of *works* and directly contrasts it with the grace of God.

Believers should not be afraid or overwhelmed or worried about what God has done on their behalf. I know for a fact how hard it can be to accept something that you not only didn't earn, but that you absolutely know you could never actually deserve! But it is the application of this very truth that positions every human being precisely where they ought to be in relationship to the God of the universe.

What would be the outcome were God to base salvation on the works of men? Well, it doesn't exactly take a rocket scientist to figure the answer. It is evident that the plan of God could never work if that was the approach He took.

The apostle Paul spent year after year traveling from church to church, almost always having to undo the confusion that

had resulted from the misunderstanding of the proper relationship between the believer and God through Christ. He seems to constantly face those on both extremes--pagan who became lax and even seemed to be reverting back to their old evil ways, and the ubiquitous Jewish crowd who was always trying to sneak the law into every argument, completely misinterpreting the meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is clear that Paul was adamantly opposed to the practice of allowing anyone or anything to become a substitute for God and His Son, and that included everything from old pagan rituals to the very Law itself! Yes, even the Law came into question in Paul's teaching, not because he in any way considered it bad or evil or against the believer, or because he thought it had been abrogated, but because of the prominent place it was being given, even becoming more important than Christ Himself! This the apostle simply would not tolerate, and, quite frankly, neither should we!

I doubt that it is possible to overstress the importance that all believers assess their spiritual lives, for the express purpose of uncovering anyone or anything that might be, knowingly or inadvertently, occupying a higher place than Christ and the Father. I know just how easy it is to have such an idol hidden in one's life. And many times, it will be something that seems altogether right and good, even Godly, but it won't be God Himself! And that, brethren, is the crux! God will

simply not take a back seat to any person or anything that man seeks to elevate.

Paul is emphatic when he tells us that the Law of God does not and indeed cannot save us. In writing his second letter to Timothy, he says:

“For it is He who delivered and SAVED us and called us with a holy calling. He did it, NOT because of anything of MERIT that we have done, but because of His own purpose and GRACE, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (II Tim. 1:9).

From his prison cell late in life, Paul writes to his fellow-laborer Titus in this same regard by saying:

“For we ourselves also were once disobedient, deluded and misled, slaves to all sorts of cravings and pleasures, wasting our days in malice, jealous, and envy; hateful and hating one another. But when the goodness of God our Savior to man appeared, He SAVED us, NOT because of any WORK OF RIGHTEOUSNESS that we had done, but because of His own pity and mercy did He SAVE us, by the cleansing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out so richly upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. And He did it that we might be JUSTIFIED by His GRACE, and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7).

As you well know, there

are numerous other passages, especially in the book of Romans that speak to the very same issue. Not only does Paul teach that salvation is a free gift of God, he also champions the truth that *justification* is also by grace and faith. Notice the following passages:

“What shall we about Abraham? How does this affect his position, and what was gained by him? For if Abraham was JUSTIFIED (that is, established as just or righteous before God by acquittal from guilt), he has grounds for boasting. But not before God! For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was CREDITED to his account as RIGHTEOUSNESS. Now to the laborer, his wages are not counted as a favor or a gift, but as an obligation--something owed to him. But to one who NOT WORKING believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited to him as righteousness--the standing acceptable to God. Thus David congratulates the man and pronounce a blessing upon him to whom God CREDITS RIGHTEOUSNESS apart from the works he does” (Rom. 4:1-6).

There is some powerful instruction contained in this passage of Scripture. No matter how hard anyone tries to argue to the contrary, the inspired language of Paul rings loud and clear. The point is that in everything Paul writes with respect to grace and faith and salvation as a gift of God, he never once argues against the

Law, or implies that it is bad, or even intimates that it is somehow done away. If we can understand and remember this fact, then Paul's seemingly difficult discourses on the Law and grace can be appreciated. Before continuing on in Romans 4, notice for a moment how Paul concludes the third chapter:

“Since it is the one and same God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through their faith, for it is the same trusting faith in both cases, a firmly relying faith in Jesus Christ; do we then by this faith make the LAW OF NONE EFFECT? CERTAINLY NOT! On the contrary, we CONFIRM AND ESTABLISH THE LAW” (Rom. 3:31).

That certainly ought to dispel any dispute over where the apostle Paul stood with regard to the Law of God. It was never a question of the Law being abolished or replaced. It was the problem of misusing the Law, teaching that the keeping of its tenets earns salvation and a righteous standing before God. Paul therefore literally goes out of his way, indeed, virtually goes out on a limb, to make this point; and then at the end of the discourse comes back to the full balance by emphatically stating that not a word of what he has said concerning grace and faith should, in any way, be interpreted as undermining any part of the Law.

Let's pick up where we left off in Romans 4:

“For the promise to Abraham and his posterity, that he should inherit the world, did NOT COME through the Law, but through the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH. If it is the adherents of the Law who are to be the heirs, the faith is made futile and empty of all meaning, and the promise of God is made void...Therefore inheriting the promise is the OUTCOME OF FAITH and depends entirely upon faith, in order that it might be given as a an act of GRACE...For Abraham, all human hope having gone, hoped on in faith that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been promised...Fully satisfied and assured that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his FAITH was accredited to him as RIGHTEOUSNESS. And the words, It was accredited to him, were written not for his sake alone, but for our sakes too. Righteousness will be accredited to us also who believe in and rely on God, who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom. 4:13-24).

What could possibly be more clear? How could God make it any plainer? This passage is as simple as the proverbial 1+1=2!! It is therefore evident that both salvation and justification are conferred upon human beings because of God's grace (that is, the heart and nature of divine love, which allows God to extend His favor when it is neither deserved nor even possible to earn it).

To conclude this part of

our study, let's read one last passage from Paul's letter to the Romans, where he says:

“Therefore, since we are JUSTIFIED (that is granted a righteous standing before God) through FAITH, let us grasp the face that we have the peace of reconciliation to hold and to enjoy, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him also we have access by faith into this GRACE (the state of being in God's favor) in which we firmly stand. And let us rejoice in our hope of experiencing and enjoying the glory of God...Therefore as sin came into the world through one man, so death came in unto man as the result of sin...But God's free gift is not at all to be compared to the trespass--His grace is out of all proportion to the fall of man. For if many died through one man's falling away, much more profusely did the gift of God's grace abound for the benefit of many. Nor is the free gift at all to be compared to the effect of that one man's sin. For the sentence following the transgression of one man brought damnation, whereas the free gift, following many transgressions, brings justification. For if, because of one man's trespass death reigned through that one, much more surely will those who receive God's overflowing grace and the free gift of righteousness reign as kings in life through Jesus Christ. Well then, as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one Man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal

and a right standing with God, and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience the many were constituted sinners, so by one Man's obedience the many will be constituted righteous and made acceptable to God. But then Law came in to expand and increase the trespass, that is making it more apparent). But where sin increased, grace has surpassed it and superabounded. So that just as sin has reigned in death, so grace might reign also through righteousness which issues in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:1-2, 12-21).

Now, after saying all of this, Paul apparently senses that by going this far out on the limb, he might well be misinterpreted by some, so he brings the discussion back to a middle ground by assuring his readers not to mistake what he was saying. Notice how he accomplishes this:

"What shall we say to all of this? Are we to remain in sin in order that God's grace may abound (an obvious and present misconception among some of the brethren)? CERTAINLY NOT! How can we who died to sin live in it any longer?...Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him...For by the death He died, He died to sin [ending His relationship with it] once for all, and the life that He lives He is living to God--in unbroken fellowship with Him. Even so CONSIDER (reckon) yourselves also DEAD TO SIN, and your relationship to it broken--living

in unbroken fellowship with Jesus Christ...For sin shall no longer exert dominion over you, since now you are not under the Law [as slaves], but under grace, as subjects of God's favor and mercy. What then are we to conclude? Shall we sin because we live not under the Law, but under God's grace? CERTAINLY NOT!...And, having been set free from sin, you have become the servants of righteousness--of conformity to the divine will in thought, purpose, and action...And now since you have been set free from sin, and have become the slaves of God, you have your present reward in holiness and its end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6).

Now, with all of this information as a background or a foundation, let's push on a little further into the subject. Recall, if you will, the title of this message. It is called *Going for the Gold!* What mental pictures or images does such a title bring to your mind? Going for the gold is a familiar phrase to most of us, and, as a matter of practicality, it would embody certain realities. There would have to be certain things in place. What might they be? And, as we arrive at these various points, how can they be applied to our spiritual lives?

Well, for one thing, when anyone says that they are going for the gold, it means that they have a definite objective in mind. In other words, they are **GOAL-**

ORIENTED! Since it goes without saying that in the physical world, being goal oriented is considered a good thing, let's apply to our spiritual lives.

Is God goal-oriented? Well, I doubt that anyone here would even think to say otherwise, lest a pox come upon them and they fall down dead! God makes it crystal clear that He indeed has very specific objectives, and that He will not be dissuaded from achieving them. Writing to the Philippians, Paul says:

"I thank my God for your fellowship in advancing the gospel from the first day that you heard it until now. And I am convinced and certain of this very thing, that He who BEGAN a good work in you will CONTINUE until the day of Jesus Christ, developing and perfecting it to full completion in you" (Phil. 1:5-6).

It certainly doesn't seem as though the apostle Paul had any doubt whatsoever that his God was a goal-oriented God. Essentially Paul is saying that God always **FINISHES WHAT HE STARTS!** He thinks, He plans, He creates, He works. He is determined to perform that which He has promised. Remember how meticulously God worked out all the myriad of details with respect to Christ's fulfilling of all the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. I mean our God is a stickler for getting it just right, for making certain that every *i* is dotted and every *t* is crossed!

If therefore God is indeed goal-oriented, and goes after whatever He wants with determination and accomplishes the purpose of His every effort, what about those of us who are His children? *Going for the Gold* embodies and represents these very high Godly qualities. It reminds me of something that Paul once told the Corinthians:

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run your race that you may lay hold of the prize and make it yours. Now every athlete who goes into training conducts himself temperately and restricts himself in all things. They do it to win a wreath that will soon wither, but we do it to receive a crown of eternal blessedness that cannot wither. Therefore I do not run UNCERTAINLY--without DEFINITE AIM...But like a boxer I discipline my body by hardships and subdue it, for fear that after proclaiming to others the gospel and things pertaining to it, I, myself should be found unfit and rejected” (I Cor. 9:24-27).

I don't know about you, but Paul sounds a whole lot like a man with a mission! He compares the spiritual calling and spiritual life to the Olympic games and those who compete. He talks about a **PRIZE**, and he speaks of a **RACE**. He discusses **DISCIPLINE**, and **TEMPERANCE**. But, above all, he declares that the spiritual runner must be **GOAL-ORIENTED**. Paul speaks of it when he says that

he never allows his focus to be broken. In other words, He intends to hit what he's aiming for. In modern-day parlance, we might say his **EYES WERE ON THE PRIZE!!**

Well, brethren, that's precisely how we must be, and *going for the gold*--God's gold--requires that we be a focused, determined, persevering people who know their God and who clearly see His goal for their lives. A people who will not permit anyone or anything to get the way, to block their view, to cause them to take their eyes off the prize. Do you remember how Paul put it to the Philippians, when he said:

“For my DETERMINED PURPOSE is that I may know Him...That if possible I may attain to the resurrection out from among the dead. Not that I have already attained this IDEAL, or am already made perfect, but I PRESS on to lay hold of and make my own, that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured and made it my own yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and STRAINING FORWARD to what lies ahead, I press on toward the GOAL to win the SUPREME PRIZE to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us. So let all of us who will be spiritually mature have this mind and hold these convictions” (Phil. 3:10-15).

I don't how it could possibly be better stated. Paul's language in this passage is so

strong, so powerful, so positive, so focused, you can just imagine the kind of man he must have been. He gives the clear impression that He was utterly filled with the significance and weight of his calling. He clearly had a great goal in mind, and he was absolutely determined to keep his eyes fastened steadfastly on that Godly objective. He says that the things of the past, which could easily have plagued him and even defeated him, are no longer important enough to get in his way.

I suggest to all of us that this is exactly the attitude God desires in His children. We must be goal-oriented, approaching this calling on a daily, even moment-by-moment, basis with our eyes clearly fixed and focused on the prize--that is, that heavenly, spiritual calling to grow up to the fullness of the stature of Christ! Is that not precisely what is meant when we read in Ephesians 4:12:

“His intention was the perfecting and full equipping of the saints, that they should do the work of ministering toward building up the Church--that it might develop until we all attain oneness in the faith and in the comprehension of the full knowledge of the Son of God; that we might arrive at mature manhood--the completeness of personality which is nothing less than the STANDARD of Christ's own perfection--the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So that we may no longer be children, tossed like ships to and fro by every wind of

doctrine...but rather that our lives should lovingly express the truth, and enfolded in love that we should grow up in every way and in all things unto Him, who is the Head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:12-15).

Brethren, this is the heart, the crux, the core, the critical mass of our very existence!! If we are unwilling, too lazy, too distracted or preoccupied, too fearful, too proud, too comfortable, too self-assured, too oblivious, too careless, that we allow ourselves to lose focus, taking our eyes and therefore our minds and hearts off the goal of growing up to the fullness of Christ--we will have run our race in vain, and we shall have truly missed the mark which God has set for us. Keeping our eyes continually on the prize is *the* key, initial prerequisite if we are going to *go for the gold!!*

IDON'T WANT MUCH--I JUST WANT MORE!

In this world, anyone who *goes for the gold* is making a statement--a bold, powerful, up-front, statement that he or she wants **MORE**--more than they have, more than they are. The goal that is in their focus is something they don't yet have, but desperately desire.

There was a song once sung by Barbra Streisand that contained a particular line I have always remembered. It goes like this: **IDON'T WANT MUCH, I JUST WANT MORE!** The gist

of the song, of course, was that, in fact, she actually wanted everything.

I believe with all my heart that God wants everything for His children. One of the great failings of virtually all believers is that we seem to always be satisfied with less that God has to offer. Those who *go for the gold* are the people who will not be deterred from desiring and seeking more and more and more. In the spiritual calling God has put upon us, the identical principle holds true. You and I, of all human beings on the face of the earth, ought to have reason for an insatiable appetite for God, and we should settle for nothing less!

Time and time again, we see the great Biblical characters indicating that they want **MORE** than they have with regard to the things of God. They don't seem satisfied to receive just a few things from God, and then become comfortably content. No, they keep pressing in. They keep the pressure on God for **MORE!**

Probably the classic example of this is Moses, who was so determined to know God better that He literally broke with every convention, threw out every tradition, and stood what might have passed for good sense on its head! How? By daring to ask God, not just for a few things here and there, but for more--much more--**MUCH, MUCH MORE!!** In fact, Moses didn't stop in his insatiable desire for more until he ask God to actually show him personally His great glory. He

wanted more so badly that He didn't just go out on a limb, he went completely off the limb; he didn't go just to the edge, he went over the cliff. The height of temerity, Moses daring request went right off the scale! It was outrageous, it was unprecedented, it was dangerous, it was quite simply the boldest, most audacious, most seemingly reckless thing any human being has ever done!! And God loved every minute of it!!!

If anyone has ever *gone for the gold*, Moses did. He wanted more and more and more. His level of satisfaction was high and getting higher all the time.

Brethren, God tells us that there is more, much more, available to us as His children--more than we could imagine, more than we could ask for. And indeed we are greatly encouraged by God to ask. God is the God of **MORE!** He wants more for us, and He wants us to want more for us! Remember Christ's parable of the talents--how the very objective of the master was that he expected each servant to have more when he returned. He was interested in **MORE!**

On another occasion, He said to His disciples:

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no anxious thought for your life, what you shall eat; neither for the body, what you shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which

neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them: how much MORE better are you than the fowls?...Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If the God so clothe the grass which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much MORE will He clothe you, O you of little faith” (Luke 12:22-28).

God is truly the God of MORE, and any child of His who goes for the gold is openly signifying that he or she wants MORE OF GOD AND MORE OF WHAT GOD HAS!! And that is very good!!

When Christ had encountered the rich young ruler, He had told him to sell all that he had and give to the poor, and to come and follow Him. The Scriptures report that when heard this saying, he went away very sorrowful, because he had many riches. Peter, having heard this exchange, confessed to the Messiah, saying, “Lo, we have left all, and followed You.” Peter was always reminding Christ of those things that he thought He might forget or overlook, especially when it came to Peter!! Nevertheless, Christ responded by saying:

“Verily, I say unto you, There is no man that has left house or parents or brethren or wife or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive MANIFOLD MORE in this

present time, and in the world to come life everlasting” (Luke 18:29-30).

Folks, God’s cup is brimming over. His table is about to break under the weight of good things. His treasury is bursting at the seams. He is the God of MORE, both now and forever! And He is absolutely not averse to any of His children asking Him for MORE! In fact, He loves it. It not only makes Him joyful to share, but it also tells Him something about us, about our relationship with Him, about our closeness and familiarity with Him, about how comfortable and secure we are in Him, about how much we love and trust Him. And to top it all off, when He is able to give us MORE, guess what? It brings Him honor, and He likes that too!! Notice the following passage:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father. And WHATSOEVER you shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the FATHER may be GLORIFIED in the Son. If you shall ask ANYTHING in My name, I will do it” (John 14:12-14).

I don’t know how often we think in these terms. I mean Jesus Christ said word-for-word that those who believed in Him would do the works He did, and would do greater works than He did, and could ask anything in His name and receive it, and in so doing, the

Father would be glorified in the Son! That is powerful teaching! How many of us can truly believe and receive it? Perhaps not many at this time, due in large part to our past indoctrination in man’s religion, but hopefully that is going to change!

The Bible teaches that it glorifies and honors God for you and me to be blessed, for you and me to receive MORE! What greater incentive do we need to begin operating in this mind-set.

The way God has designed human beings, and the way He subsequently works with human beings, He introduces a catalyst, and we then respond. Our response or the degree of our response then prompts Him to act a certain way in our lives, again with the objective of prompting a reaction. This kind of process goes on all the time and is, to a great extent, how we grow and mature spiritually.

There is literally a law or divine principle that exists, wherein if we are properly aligned with the mind and will of God, we can ask and receive, ask and receive, ask and receive. Under the right circumstances, God actually wants us to ask for more and more and more. It complies with His method of working that produces the character and life of Christ within us. We need to start thinking like God thinks. We need to ask Him to get us in line with the way, the attitude, the perspective, and the approach that He utilizes.

God wants us to come to that point in our spiritual lives where we are able to ask for more and more and more, and be perfectly within the parameters of His will. As an illustration of this truth, there is a very interesting story recorded in the Old Testament--a story associated with the death of Elisha the prophet. It is found in II Kings 13:14:

“Now Elisha became ill unto death. And Jehoash the king of Israel came down to him, and wept over him...And Elisha said to him, Take you bow and arrows...Put your hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it; and Elisha put his hand upon the king’s hand. And he said, Open the window to the east. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he said, The Lord’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Syria. For you shall smite the Syrians in Aphek, till you have destroyed them. Then he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, Strike the ground. And he struck the ground three times and STOPPED. And the man of God was angry with him, and said, You should have struck FIVE OR SIX TIMES; then you would have struck down Syria until you had destroyed it; but now you shall strike Syria down only three times” (II Kings 13:14-19).

Clearly, therefore, anyone who *goes for the gold*, demonstrates openly that they are focus, goal-oriented people, who want more than what they have.

SEIZING THE DAY

Are there any other attributes of such people with which we should be familiar? The answer is yes, there certainly are. Anyone who *goes for the gold* reveals something about themselves and their outlook on life that is vitally important. *Going for the gold* means that they **SENSE AN OPPORTUNITY** of which they can take advantage, or an **OPEN DOOR** through which they can walk.

This attribute is critical to success, whether in the physical world or the spiritual realm. Everyone clearly understands how this operates in the flesh, how recognizing a window of opportunity can make the difference between success or failure. we call this quality *carpe diem* or **SEIZE THE DAY!!** And it is a crucial factor for anyone who is *going for the gold!*

Seizing the day means to recognize and make the most of a given opportunity. Most of us often miss the success that God desires, because we simply do not sense that we even have a door of opportunity. The reason for this is usually due to the fact that we tend to live our lives in a routine fashion. We tend to do the same things at the same time day after day after day. Soon life becomes so automatic that we don’t give much, if any, thought to things that might be passing by us at any particular moment in time. We are either too engrossed in other things or are so easily distracted that

opportunity knocks and we don’t ever hear the sound, much less get up and open the door!

And, of course, the other key factor in not seizing the day is simply that we do not want to respond. In other words, we may see the door of opportunity before us, but because of fear or timidity, possible embarrassment, the prospect that we might lose our present level of comfort or security or personal reputation or clique of friends, perhaps even outright laziness or complacency, we decide not to act, not to strike when the iron is hot, and thus the chance passes us by, and we return to our lives, possibly disturbed by our lack of confidence and action, making us feel guilty and effectively robbing us of a vibrant, fruitful spiritual life.

How in the world can God be glorified, if His people allow this sort of malady to creep into and dominate their lives? If we are really close to God, and love Him, and respect Him, we will have a desire to always honor Him in all that we think, say, or do. This aspect of *seizing the day* tells God a lot about us. You see, it is a Godly characteristic. It is a divine attribute. It is part of the nature of God Himself. He is like that. The apostle Paul was like that too. Here is his advice to all of us today:

“Look carefully then how you walk! Live PURPOSEFULLY and worthily, not as the unwise, but as sensible, intelligent people; MAKING THE VERY MOST OF THE TIME--

BUYING UP EACH OPPORTUNITY--because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16).

What Paul is saying here hits the nail precisely on the head! His teaching speaks directly to this very significant aspect of *going for the gold*. It means that if we are to be people who indeed do *go for the gold*--that is, **GOD'S GOLD**, we must become sensitive to everyone and everything that we encounter in life. Anyone who will *seize the day* must be a person who takes nothing for granted--absolutely **NOTHING!** He must be a person who is always on guard, constantly in a state of awareness, allowing nothing of consequence to accidentally pass him by.

Believe it or not, this is a Godly trait. In giving the ancient Israelites His initial instructions at Mt. Sinai, God told them:

"And in all things that I have said unto you be CIRCUMSPECT: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of your mouth" (Ex. 23:13).

The word rendered *circumspect* really means to be *on the lookout for, on guard, and careful*, all very necessary qualities for anyone who expects to *seize the day* and take advantage of every opportunity.

You may also recall that Paul told the Ephesians:

"Wherefore he says, Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you

light. See that you walk CIRCUMSPECTLY, not as fools, but as wise" (Eph. 5:14-15).

Paul and the other New Testament apostles often spoke of a door opening for them to spread the gospel. Paul even asked the brethren to pray that such a door of opportunity would present itself. So the notion of looking for and taking advantage of a good chance is something of which God approves. It is, in fact, one of the secrets for success, whether in this physical life or in the spiritual realm.

Brethren, we each have to ask ourselves honestly if we really are on the watch for the signs that God might send our way. Are our lives geared in such a way that our spiritual antennae are always up, or do we tend to live the routine life where one day blends into another, and where we simply aren't really very aware at all that God might be speaking to us? I don't mean to sound extreme or paint an unreal picture, but there is much to be said for true believers living their lives on the edge, alert, anticipating the next move of God, rather than finding out about late in the game and trying to play catch-up! It is good for us that we remain sharp, out front, battle-ready, that our senses be acute, that we always be on the watch, expecting God's direction, even if it happens to be sudden.

You and I can little afford to allow the time of this life to continue to pass us in that smooth, comfortable, secure, relatively uneventful fashion. We need to see ourselves as a people on a

mission--a mission from God. Our lives must come to reflect the very indwelling life, presence, and power of the Living Christ, who, I remind you, was always on guard, always on the move, always out front, always watchful, always ready, always able to take advantage of every situation, always on His Father's wavelength, always anticipating the will of God, always seizing the day--**EVERY DAY!** So must it be with us. If you should see yourself falling short of this man's stature, do not despair. You are a thousand times better off to spot a problem in your life and be willing to address it even though it may be painful or time-consuming or embarrassing, than to hide it or be oblivious to it and continue to have an easy time of it in life. Always keep in mind that you are here for a reason--God's reason. You are to become a habitation for God--His dwelling place, His living quarters, a palace fit for the King Himself!!

GOING FOR BROKE!

Going for the gold also means something else. In addition to being focused and goal-oriented, always aiming for more, and seizing the day, someone who is *going for the gold* usually has to possess yet another quality to insure success--and that attribute can be summed up simply as **GOING FOR BROKE!**

In other words, the goal you seek is worth whatever effort

you can possibly put into it. This kind of person will pull out all the stops, as it were--leave no stone unturned--search high and low--sacrifice, if necessary.

It means that a person is determined, single-minded, courageous, absolutely set on achieving the objective, and will do anything and everything to get what he or she is after.

Now, is that really a Godly trait, or does that not sound more like a attitude you would find among carnal human beings in the world? Well, amazingly enough, it is indeed a Godly trait. By way of illustration, I will cite the following example, taken from the parables of Matthew 13. Beginning in verse 44, we read:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and SELLS ALL THAT HE HAS and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he has found one pearl of great price, goes and SELLS ALL THAT HE HAS, and buys it” (Matt. 13:44-46).

Essentially, Christ is saying that when you *go for the gold*, you do it in a certain manner. You **GO ALL THE WAY!** Even if that means you have to sacrifice everything you have! This is what going for broke really means.

How about us, brethren? How do our lives stack up in this

area of spiritual growth? Are we so determined to lay hold of the best that God has that we are actually sacrificing for it? Please note that I did not say *willing to sacrifice*--but sacrifice **RIGHT NOW--AS A PART OF OUR CHARACTER AND OF THE WAY WE LIVE!!**

Day in and day out, what really is the most important thing to you, not in theory, but in practical reality? If God were to secretly observe your life on a given day, would He come away saying, *Now there's a child of Mine who is really going for the gold! He is so awake and aware and alive--so involved in the quest--giving it everything he has and giving up everything he has! I really like that!*

I know that's a hard question, but we all must realize that God is doing that very thing right at this moment and at any given moment. He is observing. He knows. He's aware. Being willing to give the achieving of a goal everything that you have means that the goal has to be the most important thing in the world for you personally. Otherwise, it will always get relegated to a lesser place on the priority list. One my favorite sayings is this: **WHATEVER YOU PUT FIRST ALWAYS GETS DONE!!** The truth of that statement is profound. It is so accurate that there is no need to try and prove it. All you can do is make absolutely certain that you have what is truly most important at the top of the list. If you do, I can unconditionally guarantee that you will do

whatever it takes, sacrifice whatever is required, pull out every stop, never give up, never be satisfied with anything but the accomplishing of the goal, and you **WILL** be successful! Why? Because if this attribute is made a part of your character, you will be pursuing God and the things of God with all your heart, soul, and being. And what good will that do? Well, for starters, it will make the God of the universe **HAPPY!** And when that occurs, good things start happening!!

Remember that when God says, **“Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might,”** He is not making some unfair demand. He is, in essence, informing us that this is precisely the way He Himself is, and the way that we should become! Indeed, going all the way or *going for broke* is always one of the chief characteristics of anyone who is *going for the gold!*

QUEST FOR THE BEST!

Finally, *going for the gold* means that those involved are not only focused, *goal-oriented* people, not only those who *want more*, not only those who *seize the day*, not only those who *go for broke*--they are also those who want **THE VERY BEST**--the grand prize, and they will settle for nothing less!

Do we recognize that God has literally set in front of His children every factor and provision for their unqualified success? Do

Do we realize that He is intensely interested in seeing us win the highest prize--the very best He has to offer? Notice how Paul puts it:

“Seeing the greatness of this plan by which you are built together in Christ, I bow my knees before the Father...May He grant you out of the RICH TREASURY of His glory to be strengthened with MIGHTY POWER in the inner man by the Holy Spirit. May Christ through your faith actually DWELL and find His PERMANENT HOME in your hearts...That you may have the power to grasp with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of His love. That you may really come to know, through EXPERIENCE the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge, that you may be FILLED unto ALL the FULLNESS OF GOD, and become a body wholly filled and FLOODED with GOD HIMSELF! Now to Him who, by the power that is at work within us, is able to do SUPER-ABUNDANTLY, far OVER and ABOVE all that we ask or think, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever” (Eph. 3:14-21).

I quoted this passage from *The Amplified Bible*, because it tends to give a more graphic and expanded intent of the language. And what glorious language it is indeed! It ought to convince and convict us that God is not just good, He is overwhelmingly good. He not only made everything and possesses everything, but He lives

to share all that He has with you and me. His table is truly overflowing. And the marvelous factor in all of this is that what God has provided is not just for the distant future, but for us **RIGHT NOW!**

In closing his letter to the Philippians, Paul once again comments on how great the abundance and magnanimity of God toward us truly is. He writes:

“But my God shall supply ALL YOUR NEEDS according to His RICHES in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

And when writing his second letter to the church at Corinth, he was inspired to say:

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, ALWAYS having ALL SUFFICIENCY in ALL THINGS may abound to EVERY good work” (II Cor. 9:8).

God is the best, and God has the best. Those who will commit themselves to *going for the gold* will always desire and aim for the highest possible prize, the very best that God can and will give.

The Scriptures teach us that God wishes we abound in every good thing--that our cup truly runneth over. He states emphatically that He is able and willing to give to us far more than we might even dare ask or think to ask. It seems irrefutably evident that there is no known limit as to how far a child of God may go in the pursuit of and the receiving of

the good things of God, the greatest manifestation of which is Christ Himself literally living within the heart of a believer.

While *Going for the gold* may indeed be a phrase that we generally associate with human endeavors, the principles are equally applicable to one's spiritual life as well. I believe that the key to the spiritual transformation necessary to receive the very best God has for us is reaching that point where we can see ourselves from His perspective--when we can come to truly believe that we are exactly who and what the Bible says we are in Christ. Coming to fully accept God's point of view on this important subject is one of the most liberating and empowering things that can occur in a believer's life.

So, I will close this message by simply reminding all of us that, in Christ, we are:

- 1) Children in God's divine family
- 2) Saints--holy people of God
- 3) Forgiven of all our sins
- 4) Justified before God
- 5) The righteousness of Christ
- 6) Royal priests
- 7) Able to do all things through C.
- 8) Seated in heavenly places
- 9) More than conquerors
- 10) Friends of God
- 11) Heirs of the universe
- 12) A habitation for God
- 13) Possessors of eternal life
- 14) Carrying within us the seed of God's own indestructible heredity.

Let's praise and thank God for granting us such a blessed Feast!