

PHILIPPIANS: INTRODUCTION

Lesson 1 Various Text

INTRODUCTION: Why Christians Suffer and face persecution:

Who or what dictates the course of the Christian faith? Is it the Christians and churches, the governments or is it the Lord? Some would say the rise and fall of the church in certain countries and times are due in part because of the lack of obedience to Christ and false doctrine. Some say it is because of oppressive governments and corrupt leaders. We know this is not absolutely true because even in Iran and China today the church exist and is growing under tremendous persecution. So, who or what allows the church to ascend and descend in civilizations throughout the course of history? Who allows Christians and their leaders to endure persecution? Who allows faithful godly men and women to die a martyrs death for the cause of Christ? Who guides and directs all this? It is Christ Jesus Himself?

Take note of Jesus' own words: Matt 5.10-12

- *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (10)*
- *Bless are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." (11)*
- *"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (12)*

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, in His first recorded sermon, Jesus tells His followers what it will be like for those who follow Him. He tells them that they will be HAPPY (Blessed), but this happiness will come with a price. Persecution or even death (Luke 9.23).

Now, flash forward three years later in Jesus' ministry in the upper room. Jesus prepares His disciples them for His departure. He tells them that they will experience difficult times ahead: *"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me (Jesus) before it hated you." (John 15.18)*

Then he comforts them by saying: *"In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world (Jn. 16.33):*

When Christians identify themselves as followers of Christ, the reaction from the world (be it, certain peers, friends, and family members, etc...) is met with persecution. This persecution is because of Christ.

Why do they hate Christ? Jesus tells them:

"...they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But, they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE'" (John 15.24-25).

The world hates Jesus without cause. Since they will hate Him, they will also hate you. But, remember, Jesus says, “*HAPPY*” is the one who is persecuted for His cause. By the way, all the disciples were put to death for their faith in Christ, except John. Many more throughout history and even today, believers are being put into prison and even executed, sometimes, just for having a Bible in their possession.

The Apostle Paul knows what it is like to suffer for Christ. While writing this letter to the church in Philippi, Paul is in prison for the cause of Christ and His gospel. Paul already knew that he would have to suffer for Christ. Christ had already revealed to him the type of ministry he will have and how much suffering it will bring to his life and ministry. This was probably due in part because of the persecution Paul brought on the church in it’s beginning.

After approving Stephen’s death in Jerusalem, Paul (Saul) went about ravaging the church, even putting believers in prison, even putting them to death. On his way to Damascus, the resurrected Savior apprehended Paul along the way. Read here Jesus’ conversation with Paul in Acts 9:

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (v.4)

“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting...” (v.5)

From this encounter with Jesus, Paul being temporarily blind was led to Damascus and waited three day until the Lord sent a disciple named “Ananias” (vv. 9-10). Here is the message that Ananias was to give to Paul. It would become Paul’s ministry objective from Christ, which gives him the authority and call to be an Apostle of Christ. To Ananias Christ said:

“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” (Acts 9.15-16).

So, just as all the disciples heard from Jesus, the price and cost of discipleship would be to suffer for His cause. Yet, all of them, including Paul would know joy inexpressible, because they would come to know the great hope laid up in heaven, where there would be much joy and peace.

I. Paul and the Prison Letters

A. LOOK IT UP:

1. Read: Philippians 1.7, 13, 17; Acts 21.27-36; 28.11-30; Eph. 6.20.
2. Report:
 - a) What do we learn about Paul’s present situation?
 - b) Where is he writing this letter from?
 - c) Why is he in prison?
 - d) What was the purpose of Paul’s imprisonment?

B. LEARN IT:

Letters from Prison: The letter Paul wrote to the Philippians is called a “prison letter.” This letter is one of four prison letters. The others are: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. These letters were written by Paul during his incarceration in

Rome. Some have narrowed down his imprisonment to be around AD 60-62. Paul's imprisonment in Rome is verified in Acts 28.11-30. Paul spent two years under house arrest, guarded by soldiers (Acts 28.16). He was allowed to receive visitors (v.30) and shared the gospel (v.31) until his death, which we presume through church tradition, he was executed as a Roman citizen. Why is Paul in prison? His prison letters make it very clear that his captivity was because of the sake and cause of Christ (Phil. 1.9; Eph. 3.1; Col. 4.18; Phil. 1.12-14). It was during these final years of Paul's life that the gospel spread even more. Paul would even write that his time in prison was for the purpose of spreading the gospel in the gentile capital of Rome.

C. LIVE IT:

1. Read Philippians 1.12-13; Luke 21.12-19
 - a) What good would come from Paul's imprisonment for the Kingdom of God and the cause of Christ?
 - b) What good can come from us being persecuted as believers?
 - c) What promise and assurance does Jesus give His disciples concerning persecution and death?
 - d) Have you been persecuted for your faith? How did you respond? What was your hope resting on?

II. The Philippians and Redemptive History

A. LOOK IT UP:

1. Read: Daniel 2.36-43; 8.20-22; Acts 16.1-15
2. Report:
 - a) What can we learn from these verses concerning God's redemptive plan in history concerning the Philippians?
 - b) Who directs the paths of nations and the movement of the gospel of Christ?
 - c) What part do we as God's people play in God's redemptive plan? What does God expect from us?

B. LEARN IT: *The History of Philippi:*

Location: Philippi was located in the southern Macedonian region in Europe, ten miles north Neapolis, a seaport on the Aegean Sea.

Beginnings: Philippi has its beginnings during the 4th century B.C.. It was originally known as "Crenides" (Fountain or Springs). Its native people were the barbaric "Thracians" who resided there before Philippi II of Macedon conquered them and changed the name of "Crenides" to "Philippi" in 356 B.C.. Phillip II made Philippi his capital of the Greek Empire in 359 B.C.. Philippi II envisioned uniting Greece with the world, but died before meeting this goal. His son, Alexander the Great realized this vision just in twelve short years. Philippi became the showcase of Grecian culture.

Rise and fall of Greece and Philippi: The Grecian Empire is mentioned briefly in the Bible according to Daniel's prophecy. It is recorded as third of four kingdoms in Daniel's vision and interpretation (Dan. 2.39; 8.5-7). Daniel's description accurately predicted the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander which brought a close to more than two hundred years of Persian rule which extended into Macedonia (Dan. 8.20-21). After Alexander's reign and death, the Grecian Empire was divided into four parts, again as Daniel accurately predicted (Dan. 8.22). This set the stage for the fourth and final Gentile world power, Rome, which would dominate the New Testament era at the time of Christ and the spreading of His church throughout the Roman Empire (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts). Philippi was conquered by Rome in 168 B.C. and became a Roman military colony in 42 B.C.. In 27 B.C., Philippi received autonomous status, immune from Roman tribute and treated as if they were citizens of Italy.

The Philippian Culture: Philippi in Paul's time had a diverse culture. Three people groups resided in Philippi. The "Thracians" (natives), the "Greeks" (who brought in logic and art) and the "Romans" (who brought in the Latin language, law, peace). There is little evidence of Jewish culture existing in Philippi. There were no known synagogues, hence the reason Paul found a prayer group outside the city by a river (Acts 16.13). A synagogue could only be formed when there were ten males living in a city.

The Philippian Religions: The religious background of Philippi began with the "Thracians." They had three gods: "Liber Pater, Thracian Rider, and Bendis." Pater was identified with the grape harvest and wine. He is equated to "Bacchus or Dionysus" the local god of Philippi. Thracian Rider was associated with hunting and the hunter cult. He is depicted being on a horse. Bendis was a Thracian goddess identified with Diana and Artemis. She was dressed in boots and short skirt and carried a spear or knife and appeared very athletic. Worship directed to her involved sexual or orgiastic practices that came to be popular with Diana and Artemis. The other non-indigenous people groups, such as the Persians, Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, all infused into Philippi their own cultic beliefs. There were probably two dozen cultic beliefs residing in Philippi during Paul's time.

Religious Acts Laws: The Political policies governed by the Roman senate during Paul's time had an impact on whether certain religions were legal or illegal. In regards to the practice of religion, the senate of Rome affirmed the national regional religions of conquered people. Meaning, since Jerusalem was a conquered city of Rome, the Jewish religion would be accepted and practiced freely outside their indigenous region as long as they did not promote public discord, anti-Roman propaganda and were not excessive in debauchery. This meant for the Christians, they were allowed to practice openly and freely in Rome because the Romans viewed them as a sect of the Jewish religion. This freedom was taken away when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70. Therefore, while Paul traveled during his missionary journeys, including to Philippi, he could do so freely. Remember, Paul was not in prison because of Roman law, but

because of the Jews in Jerusalem. Paul, chose to remain in prison to be sent to Rome so that he could have an audience with Caesar (Acts 25.21)

Philippi at the crossroads to the world: The “Via Egnatia” was the main highway going from Rome toward the east, ran through Philippi. This highway brought much commerce and many travelers to Philippi. Another by way to the city was the Gangites (modern Angitis) River, which was a natural advantage to the city, since it constituted another ancient thoroughfare (cf. Acts 16.13).

Paul and the first convert in Europe: In Acts 16, Paul desired to preach in Asia Minor (Turkey). The Holy Spirit would not allow him to do so (Acts 16.6-10). In a vision, Paul heard a man crying out for him to come to Macedonia to help them. So, immediately, the next day, Paul and his companions (Timothy, Luke and Silas) went to Macedonia, concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel to them. When Paul arrived to Philippi, he encountered a business woman from Thyatira named “Lydia.” She was a worshiper of God. When Paul shared the gospel with her, she became the first convert to Christianity in Europe (Acts 16.14). From this conversion, a new church was birth which began meeting in her home (Acts 16.15).

1. LIVE IT:

- a) How important is it for you to know the Biblical and historical background to Philippi?
- b) How will this make a difference to your understanding Paul’s letter?
- c) What did you learn about God’s plan of redemptive history concerning Philippi?

III. A Survey of the Philippian Letter

The message of Paul’s letter to the Philippian church in Macedonia is paradoxical. Suffering and joy, prison and rejoicing. Paul presents an unusual view of life. A uniquely Christian view that demonstrates the “mind of Christ” which is key to this epistle.

One of the themes of the letter is the participation in the gospel, because Christ is all. This participation is the fellowship that Paul and the Philippians shared together. This is the work in which all Christians should partner together in. Paul reminds the Philippians that we are all partners together in the work of the gospel. In being partners, it is crucial that we have the same mind of Christ (2.5-11). The gospels reveal the Jesus’ words and works, this letter and the passage above unveils Christ’s mind.

Below are some key points that will be considered in our study of Philippians:

- Category/Author: Pauline Epistle, Prison letter
- Main Theme: “How to Suffer with Joy”
- Key Words: Rejoice, Christ
- Key Verses: 1.21; 3.7; 4.6-7; 4.13
- Structure:

- Greeting (1.1-11)
- Paul's situation at Rome (1.12-26)
- Paul's exhortation for unity (1.27-2.18)
- Paul's plan to send help and encouragement (2.19-30)
- Paul's warning about Jewish legalism (3.1-21)
- Paul's thanks for support (4.1-23)
- Outline:
 - Christian Suffering for the cause of Christ (Be joyful in suffering) - Ch. 1
 - Christian Service with the mind of Christ (Be humble in service) - Ch. 2
 - Christian Steadfastness for the sake of Christ (Be motivated in Christ) - Ch. 3
 - Christian Strength for the glory of Christ (Be encouraged in life) - Ch. 4

CLOSING APPLICATION:

Paul's message to the Philippians encourages all believers that we are not alone in the participation of the gospel. So whether one is in prison or free at home, we are all partners both locally and abroad until Christ calls us home. Here are a few thoughts of application concerning this study:

1. God is sovereign to use nations and empires to prepare the way of the gospel just as He did with the Thracians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. All these paved the way for Paul's missionary journeys to bring the gospel to the utter most part of the world.
2. Trust in the Lord and be joyful concerning God's plan to build His church through the participation of His people with the Gospel of Christ, even in the midst of suffering for Christ's sake.
3. While time is at hand and breath is given, follow the Divine leadership of God's Spirit as He creates Divine appointments for the gospel to be shared.
4. It is crucial that believers represent Christ well in any culture, This is important to faith, the kingdom of God and the gospel of Christ.

“Partners Together”
Lesson 2
Philippians 1.1-11

John Bunyan (1628-1688) was an English writer and Puritan preacher best known for his book, “The Pilgrim’s Progress.” This book and other writings by Bunyan were written when he was arrested and spent twelve years in prison because he refused to give up preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in its purity to the poor, and for refusing conformity to national creeds and ceremonies. Bunyan used his time in prison like the Apostle Paul for the progress of the gospel of Christ. One of the writings that came from his imprisonment was a lesser known document entitled, “Prison Meditations.” In this brief poetic document, John Bunyan would pen seventy stanzas to a dear friend reflecting his then, current circumstance. Here are a few excerpts from his “Prison Meditations.”

*I am, indeed, in prison now
In body, but my mind
Is free to study Christ, and how
Unto me he is kind.*

*For though men keep my outward man
Within their locks and bars,
Yet by the faith of Christ I can
Mount higher than the stars.*

*When they do talk of banishment,
Of death, or such-like things;
Then to me God sends heart’s content,
That like a fountain springs*

These feelings expressed by Bunyan are the feelings of all Christ’s prisoners. In fearless devotion to the will of his God, Bunyan takes on the mind of Christ and defends the progress of the gospel knowing that for him as the Apostle Paul penned in prison, “*to live is Christ and to die is gain*” (Phil. 1.21).

Bunyan’s writings in prison also become a source of encouragement for other believers during his time of persecution. Just as Paul wrote:

“...that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear” (Phil. 1.14b).

What Paul and John Bunyan are saying in their writings is that we are not alone. Whether you are free or you are in prison for the sake of the gospel of Christ, we can have courage for we are all partners together “*from the first day until now*” (Phil. 1.5).

BACKGROUND:

The story concerning the founding of the church in Philippi appears in Acts 16. Paul, after receiving a vision of a man from Macedonia appealing for help (Acts 16.9), he and his companions (Timothy, Silas, and Luke) left Troas, sailing to Neapolis and from there to Philippi (Acts 16.11). It would be on a sabbath day outside the city gate by the riverside that Paul would find a place where a group of Hebrew women gathered to pray (because there were not enough Hebrew men to establish a synagogue). One of the women named Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira, opened her heart to receive Christ. She became the first convert in Europe and the first church in Europe would be established in her home in Philippi (Acts 16.14-15).

Several years later at the close of Paul's third missionary journey, Paul was arrested, beaten and tried in Jerusalem by Jewish authorities (Acts 21.27-23.22). He was then taken by Roman authorities to Caesarea where he was heard by Felix the governor and placed in prison for two years (Acts 23.23-24.27). When Felix was replaced by Festus, Paul had an opportunity to be set free, but appealed to be taken to Rome so he may have an audience with Caesar (Acts 25-26). Paul was then sent to Rome to be placed in house arrest for two years in his own rented quarters, "*preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness*" (Acts 28.31). This is the back drop of this letter to the Philippians and his letter to Philemon, the Ephesians and Colossians.

THESIS: Whether you are free or in prison we are all partners together in defense of and for the progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. PARTNERS IN GRACE (1.1-2)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 1.1-2; 2.25; 4.2-3; Acts 16.14-15, 40;

1. List all the people mentioned in the verses above?
2. Who is this letter addressed to?
3. What do all these people have in common from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ?

B. LEARN IT:

The Addressers (1.1a): Paul addresses himself as the author of this letter to the saints in Philippi. He includes Timothy not because he is a co-author of the letter, but as an associate whom the Philippians knew. Timothy might have also served as Paul's assistant as Paul dictated this letter (cf. 2 Thess. 3.17). The Philippians knew Timothy since he had been with Paul when Paul founded the church in Philippi (Acts 16.1-12) and on other occasions too (Acts 19.22; 20.3-6). By mentioning Timothy, it may be assumed that Timothy was with Paul in Rome during Paul's house arrest there. Paul characterizes himself and Timothy as "bond-servants" (Grk. "*doulos*") of Christ." This description stressed ones strong commitment to his or her Lord. To be the Lord's "bond-servant" meant to be His slave or servant. The NET Bible notes that "for a Jew this concept did not connote drudgery, but honor and privilege." To be a "bond-servant" of the Lord Jesus Christ was considered to be a privilege not a burden.

The Addressees (1.1b): As he often did, Paul addresses his fellow believers as “saints” (cf. Rom. 1.7; 1 Cor. 1.2; 2 Cor. 1.1; Eph. 1.1; Col. 1.2; 1 Thess. 3.13; 2 Thess. 1.10; Phile 5,7). What does this title “saint” reflect? It reflects the Christian’s present justified standing before God. They are His “Holy Ones.” This title reflects how God sees you now, not necessarily how others see you now. This is because of Jesus’s shed blood which covers your sin and satisfied God’s judgement concerning your sin. You are holy not to yourself, but because of the sinless blood atonement of Christ Jesus our Lord. Because of this, whosoever trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation is called a “saint” of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul also addresses the elders (overseers) and deacons of the church in Philippi. This is the only place in the epistles that Paul includes these two offices in his greetings. The reason they are mentioned specifically might be because Epaphroditus had come to Paul with money from the church (2.25) and/or because of the friction that existed within this church (4.2-3). The qualifications and characteristics of these two offices are expounded by Paul in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These two offices were responsible for the spiritual and temporal ministries of the church. Others Paul mentions by name in this letter are: Epaphroditus (2.25); Euodia, Synthyche, Clement”*and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life*” (4.2-3),

The Blessing (1.2): One of Paul’s favorite phrases in his greetings was “grace” and “peace.” “Grace” refers to God’s unmerited favor and divine enablement. “Peace” reflects the ended hostilities between God and the sinner, and the inner tranquility that are because of God’s grace. Paul addresses that this blessing (gift) is from “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Meaning this, that because of God’s plan to save us through His only Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, we are partners together as His saints by His grace, bringing us at peace not only with the Lord, but also bringing peace in our souls with one another.

C. LIVE IT:

Partners of Grace: What this means is this, while we were once enemies of God, “*we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life*” (Rom. 5.10). This means that every person who professes Jesus as Lord and commits themselves to Him alone for salvation are saved. We are partners together because of His grace alone through Christ alone by faith alone. This partnership of grace is the basis for a unified spirit of cooperation for the progress of the gospel. A church (it’s leaders and members) who understand this partnership of grace will be unified in the effort and progress of the gospel of Christ.

II. PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL (1.3-8)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 1.3-8

1. How does Paul remember the believers?
2. What is he most thankful for?

3. What is Paul confident of?
4. What is Paul implying in verse 7, how were they “partakers of grace” with him? What did they do?

B. LEARN IT:

Partners in prayer (1.3-4): When Paul writes of “remembering” the Philippian believers, he is referring to how he prays for them. Paul is thankful to the Lord concerning their “participation in the gospel.” Paul’s “thankfulness” is to God, not the Philippians. Paul is thankful to God because He has made the Philippians partners with Paul in the gospel. His prayers are not only fueled with gratitude, but are offered with “joy.” Paul rejoices in the fact that he and Timothy are not alone in the work of the gospel. This makes the work, the suffering, the imprisonment, and success sweeter knowing that there are others in the trenches of life proclaiming the truth concerning Jesus Christ.

I am reminded of when Elijah fled from Jezebel after he had killed all the prophets of Baal with the sword (1 Ki. 19.1). Elijah came to a cave to Horeb, depressed and lonely. He complains to God that he had:

“been very zealous for the Lord...for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Ki. 19.10).

You would have thought after such a victory that Elijah would have confidence and joy, instead he was depressed and felt alone against the world.

The Lord informed Elijah that he in fact was not alone, that the He had 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed to Baal (1 Ki. 19.18).

Faithful servants of Christ sometimes give up serving the Lord because they feel like they are doing the work by themselves. Paul rejoices in the fact that, that even in prison, he knew he was not alone. To God, he was thankful for the Philippian’s partnership.

Partners in fellowship (1.5): Paul mentions that the Philippian’s partnership was consistent. Beginning by the river when Lydia first received the Lord until now (Acts 16.12-40; Phil. 1.5). The word “participation” expresses a “shared contribution” to the work. In the Greek language it is the word (koinonia), which means, “fellowship.”

Partners in God’s work (1.6): What was the “good work” that Paul points out? It is the “good work of salvation.” The New Testament reveals that salvation is a process. It involves justification, when a sinner trusts Jesus as Savior. It includes sanctification that occurs continuously from the time of justification until the Christian’s death or the Rapture. Then, it culminates in glorification, when the redeemed sinner finally sees Jesus and experiences transformation into His image. To this, Paul is “confident” that the Lord will complete this “good work” until we all see Jesus. God will see the work of the gospel all the way through. Paul was confident that God would continue His sanctifying

work in the Philippians, so that they might become even more effective partners with him in this great task. What was this great task? The defense and confirmation of the gospel (v.7).

Partners in apologetics (1.7-8): Paul tells them that it is only right for him to be joyful because of the partnership they had together in the gospel. Since he was “remembering” them in prayer, they were on his “heart” (v.7). Paul had a personal relationship with the Philippians, even though they were miles apart. It’s like the saying, “*distance makes the heart grow fonder.*” This personal relationship was based upon the salvation they shared together and their calling to spread the gospel. They were bound not only by the gospel, they were also one in Paul’s “imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.” Together, God enabled them with grace to “confirm” what the gospel is and to “defend it (cf. 1.29-30; 3.1; 4.4).

The Greek word for “defense” is “apologia.” It simply means to defend by speaking. It is a term that refers to a legal defense as when one stands for a defense against a charge in court. This may require some to answer to those who speak against the gospel or to show clearly that the gospel is true. Certainly this is something Paul did before the Jews and before Festus, sometimes alone (cf. Acts 22.1; 25.16; 2 Tim. 4.16).

Paul’s words here may be indicating that the partnership they share together gives him the confidence to stand trial as he defends the truth concerning the gospel by the confirmation of his words.

C. LIVE IT:

It is imperative that all believers who profess Jesus as Savior to defend and confirm the centrality of our faith, that is, the gospel.

Here is our defense:

“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15.3-4).

“that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10.9).

If anyone adds to or takes away from the gospel above, then it is not the truth and we as partners together ought to stand up and defend the truth of the gospel. Because, anything outside of the said truth above is treason against God and His only begotten Son, Christ Jesus our Lord.

Here is how one confirms the gospel: If one clearly speaks the truth above apologetically, they are confirming in their heart and soul what they know to be true by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Consider Peter and John before the council in Jerusalem (Acts 4.1-12). They were arrested and stood trial before Jewish leaders. When it was asked “*by what power, or in what name, have you done this*” (v.8), the Holy Spirit filled them when they confirmed

together that it was “*by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead...and there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved*” (vv. 9-12).

In living this out, consider the questions below:

1. Do you know what the gospel is?
2. How are you defending it?
3. How is it confirmed in your life?

III. PARTNERS IN GLORY (1.9-11)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 1.9-11; Eph. 1.17-19a; 3.16-19; Col. 1.9b-12.

1. What is Paul doing in verses?
2. What are the common themes in Paul’s prayers?
3. What is the end goal of Paul’s prayers?

B. LEARN IT:

Paul’s prayer for the church (v.8-10): Paul concludes his greeting with a prayer. This prayer (vv. 9-11) is similar to others Paul writes in his letters (Eph. 1.17-19a; 3.16-19; Col. 1.9b-12). Kenneth Boa comments that Paul’s prayers “are transformational when we pray through them regularly and take them to heart.” Why is this? Because they, like Jesus’ High Priestly prayer, they seek the highest good for the church and the glory of God through Christ. Paul knows that the journey of the Christian life can only move forward as the Spirit of God indwells us.

In this prayer, Paul prays that the love of the Philippian believers will abound still more in the knowledge of Christ so that they may have every kind of insight to discern what is best. So that, when Christ comes, they may be found to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ.

Paul’s prayer is for the glory of the Lord (v.11): This is really what the Christian life is all about. Glorifying God through Jesus Christ our Lord. In Ephesians 1.6, 12, 14; Paul’s explains that all the things God does to bring salvation to us is all for His glory. In 1 Corinthians 10.31, Paul writes:

“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

The growth of the Christian throughout the journey of their faith in Christ is to bring glory to Him. It begins with the love of Christ that spurs us on to grow in the knowledge of who He is, which then, as His Word abides in us and with the enablement of the Holy Spirit, teaches us to discern all things to know whether they are true or false. So that, in the end, when Christ calls us home through death or the Rapture, we may as Paul wrote be the “*praise of the glory of His grace*” (Eph. 1.6).

C. LIVE IT:

There are two applications to this prayer.

First, are you growing in Christ? Are you being disciplined? Are you in God's Word? Are you walking and demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit as you crucify the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5.22-24). The Christian life is a Christ centered life that seeks to know the Will of God in Christ. To serve Christ in such a way that pleases Him, bringing glory to Him alone.

Second, are you praying for the growth of others? Paul's prayers are excellent reminders how we ought to pray for one another. We need to follow Paul's example of putting the spiritual needs of others high on our prayer list. We still need God's supernatural enablement to help us accomplish the "Good Works" (proclaiming the gospel) which He prepared for us to do (Eph. 2.10). Christians value highly the things of greatest importance as revealed in Scripture when they are walking in step with the Spirit of God and His Word. Only then will Christians be prepared to give a good account of themselves at the judgment seat of Christ and hear those glorious words, "Well done, good and faithful slave" (Matt. 25.21).

CONCLUSION:

On November 12, 1660, John Bunyan, at the invitation of a friend, went to teach the Bible in a home in Bedfordshire. As, Bunyan and a few friends began to pray, the local constable came in and found them with Bibles in their hands, ready to speak and hear God's word. The constable had a warrant for Bunyan's arrest for illegally preaching the Word of God and understanding the Scriptures literally (meaning "*he that believe the shall be saved*"). When given an option that if he would not call people together anymore, he may be released. But Bunyan said to his prosecutor: "*for I durst not leave off that work which God had called me to.*" After a few more words to persuade Bunyan to refrain from preaching the gospel, John Bunyan was imprisoned and remained there twelve years as a prisoner of Christ for the defense and confirmation of the gospel by which we are partners together in. (*The Relation of My Imprisonment - John Bunyan*).

It is my prayer, that we all may demonstrate the same faithfulness as John Bunyan and the Apostle Paul, as well as the many believers who have been persecuted for the sake of Christ. Partners in grace, in the gospel, for the glory of the Lord. Amen!

“Greater Progress of the Gospel”

Lesson 3

Philippians 1.12-20

INTRO: Majority of today’s Christian martyrs are nameless to the outside world. But, because of their selfless dedication to the great commission, which brought them no earthly fame or notoriety, the gospel continues to spread around the world.

David and Linda are a striking exception to the average Christian today. Eighteen years ago these present-day martyrs left their home and church in Brooklyn, NY to minister the gospel of Y’shua to the Jews in Israel. They have undergone severe persecutions paralleling the ordeals of the early Christian church. David has had his back opened up many times from beatings; they have suffered threats and intimidation. Yet the gospel continues to go forward in Israel. Their converts include Jews, Arabs, and Gentiles. They risk being ostracized or tortured. Many have lost their lives simply because they would not renounce their faith in Christ.

Persecution and Martyrdom seem so old school or distant from the American and western church, yet, it is real even today. Today’s study reminds us that the progress of the gospel is not thwarted because of persecution in the world, if anything, the gospel and Christ’s church flourishes under persecution. Paul encourages his readers as he informs them of his present situation (1.12-17) and his hope and expectation (1.18-20), knowing that in the end, God will bring the deliverance of His “good work” to fruition whether by life or death, Christ will be exalted.

THESIS: The progress of the gospel is not dependent on our circumstance or abilities, but by the power of God through Christ.

I. WITH COURAGE (1.12-14)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 1.12-14

1. What does Paul want his readers to know?
2. Why were most of the brethren trusting in the Lord?
3. Why would Paul’s circumstance create fearless courage to share Christ?

B. LEARN IT:

No matter the circumstances (vv. 12-13): Paul abruptly goes from greeting to the main subject matter of his letter, bringing his readers up to speed concerning his present “circumstance.” The “circumstance” Paul speaks of is his imprisonment in Rome (v. 13, 7; 2 Tim. 2.9). Whenever Paul writes, “I want you to know,” he’s writing something important for his readers to know (cf. 2 Cor. 13.6; 2 Tim. 3.1). It could have been easily surmised by his readers that Paul’s imprisonment would bring the building of the church to a standstill, or at least slowed down its’ progress. But, Paul wanted his readers to know that his imprisonment actually “*turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.*” This is a great reminder for all believers, because the building and advancement of the

church is not dependent on one person or the circumstances (good or bad) of her leaders and/or members. God is in control of His church and uses any circumstance for His will and purpose. A.T. Robertson is quoted by saying, “The same God who used Moses’ rod, Gideon’s pitchers and David’s sling, used Paul’s chains.”

The word translated “progress” is a military word that describes a scout who identifies, and if possibly, removes obstacles before an advancing army. This word “signifies advancement in spite of the dangers and obstacles which block the way of the traveler” (UBS Handbook Commentary).

What did God do by using Paul’s circumstance? He used Paul’s imprisonment. Because of Paul’s circumstance, more people heard the gospel who would not otherwise have heard it, this being the “praetorian guard and everyone else” (v. 13). The “praetorian guards” were the elite soldiers whom Paul had an opportunity to witness to during his arrest. The “everyone else” were the unsaved members of the Jewish community (Acts 28.17-29), some also might have been Gentiles (e.g. Philemon). Paul was in conversation with many people during his house arrest. Therefore, Paul links his “imprisonment” with the “cause of Christ” as being part of the circumstantial progress of the gospel. In other words, when God gives you lemons in life, make lemonade. Take advantage of the opportunities the Lord gives you to proclaim the gospel to those around you.

Trusting in the Lord (v.14): Why was it crucial for Paul to inform his readers of this? It was crucial because his aggressive witness inspired the Roman Christians to be more outspoken in sharing the gospel. Rather than being unashamed or fearful, these Christians were infused with courage to speak the truth concerning Jesus Christ our Lord. They were standing up boldly for Christ and His Word by trusting in Him like they never have done before. They were courageous.

C. LIVE IT:

There may be a number of circumstantial reasons why believers remain silent concerning the gospel and the Word of God. But, the real reason is because of fear. Fear is the absence of trust. Therefore, when believers become afraid to share the Word of God and the gospel of Christ, it signifies that they do not trust God. Thus, their faith in Him is small.

The word “courage” in verse 14 means to be venturesome. One who has a “venturous” spirit is daring to take on or seek new enterprises.

When President Kennedy gave his speech concerning going to the moon, he told America that, *“We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard;...because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win.”*

We could easily rephrase this by quote by saying, “*We choose to proclaim the gospel to this generation and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; ...because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to complete.*”

Paul is quoted in Romans, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*” (Rom. 1.16).

Be courageous and unashamed for the progress of the gospel of Christ.

II. BY PROCLAMATION (1.15-18)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 1.15-18

1. Describe the two types of Christians who were preaching Christ.
2. What were their motives in preaching? Why?
3. What was Paul’s reaction to these? Why?

B. LEARN IT:

In verses 15-18 Paul indicates that there were two types of Christians who were witnessing and preaching Christ. He distinguishes them by what motivated them to preach. What’s at stake here is the message. The preaching of Christ. The word “to preach” means to be a “herald” or to make “proclamation.” The message preached was either to “preach about Christ” or “to tell people about Christ.” Regardless, the end goal was to “tell the good news about Christ.”

Some preached to advance their own agendas (vv. 15, 17): This first group, Paul pointed out, preached because they were envious of Paul’s prominence (envy and strife). Simply, they were jealous of Paul and stirred up quarrels among the brethren. Who were these preachers? Possibly the Judaizers that Paul speaks of later in (3.1-16). They were pro-Christ, but anti-Paul preachers. Paul informs his readers that these preachers “*proclaimed Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives*” (v.16). Their ambition was to cause Paul “distress” in his imprisonment just as Paul’s prominence caused them distress. They had a self-seeking motive in their preaching to gain the spotlight by becoming more active and outspoken during Paul’s imprisonment.

Some preached to advance Paul’s agenda (vv. 15, 16): The second group who were preaching Christ had a contrasting motive. Their’s was a selfless motive. They did not preach Christ to gain attention to themselves, but to bring attention to Christ with “good intentions” and “out of love” (v. 15b, 16a). Out of love for who? Some scholars say, out of love for Paul, connecting Paul’s circumstance and his “appointed” defense of the gospel (v. 16b). They “knew” how important Paul’s defense of the gospel was, therefore they wanted to represent Paul well and sacrificially proclaim the same defense as Paul concerning the truth about Christ.

Joyful disposition (v. 18): Regardless, Paul’s disposition was to rejoice in the fact that “*whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice*” (v.18). Paul did not sweat the small stuff. “What then” could be rendered as, “What does it matter?” Paul knew what the big picture was. Paul was not concern if some were for him or not. Paul only cared that the truth concerning Christ was preached. This brought genuine joy to Paul in prison. I guess you could say that those who were anti-Paul failed in their efforts to bring distress to Paul, because their activity in proclaiming Christ had an opposite effect on him, it actually caused Paul to “rejoice” not distress.

C. LIVE IT:

Warren Wiersbe states that “when you have the single mind, you look upon your circumstances as God-given opportunities for the furtherance of the Gospel, and you rejoice at what God is going to do instead of complaining about what God did not do.”

Do you look upon your circumstances as God-given opportunities for the furtherance of the Gospel? Do you look upon them as a glass half full verses half empty? Or, do you refrain from sharing the gospel because you complain about what God did not do?

Jonah was a complainer. He did not want to share the God’s message to the people in Nineveh because he knew that God would forgive them instead of punishing them. Therefore, Jonah complains and gets angry with the Lord because the Lord did not do what Jonah wanted the Lord to do.

Preaching the cause of Christ, as long as it is truthful, is always an occasion to rejoice always! Look at the big picture for what is at stake. The eternal souls of millions, perhaps billions in the world. Don’t let others kill or steal your joy, instead rejoice in what God is doing to bring people unto Himself, whether in “pretense or in truth.”

III. WITH HOPE-FILLED EXPECTATION (1.19-20)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 1.19-20.

1. What does Paul mean “*that this will turn out for my deliverance*”? See (1.6) for a clue.
2. What were the two things Paul was counting on for this deliverance to reach fulfillment?
3. What is Paul hopeful for and what would it mean to his life?

B. LEARN IT:

Because of spiritual enablement (v.19): Paul expected some form of “deliverance” from his present circumstance. Would it be physical deliverance from imprisonment or some spiritual deliverance? Paul will speak of later that he anticipated to be release from prison (1.25; 2.24), but the verses that follow (1.19) point to his thinking of the completion of salvation he had referred to previously (v.6).

Throughout the Old Testament and New Testament the words for “salvation,” “deliverance,” and such can be apply to both physical or spiritual salvation. One example is to be “delivered” from ones enemies (Ps.27.1ff).

“The Lord is my light and my SALVATION; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the DEFENSE of my life; Whom shall I dread?”

In this verse, as well as many, “salvation” and “defense” are not speaking of spiritual deliverance, but physical.

In our verse (v.19) the word “deliverance” is (soteria) which is standardly translated as “salvation.” Probably Paul meant that his prison experience and the consequent furtherance of the gospel were all part of God’s completion of the good work that He had begun in him. Thus, whether Paul lives or dies, Paul would be delivered and the progress of the gospel would continue. God will complete the work of the gospel (1.6).

There were two means necessary for this salvation that Paul was counting on. The “prayers” of the Philippians and the Lord’s “provision” of enablement through His Spirit (cf. Rom. 15.30; Col. 4.3). The matter of the Kingdom work is not a fleshly work. It is a spiritual work. It is a work that is accomplished by the Lord by enabling His people by His Spirit to walk in the “good works” God prepared for us in advance so that “we would walk in them” (Eph. 2.10). Again, the “good works” being the work of the gospel. Since it is a spiritual battle, it can only be fought with spiritual weapons. Paul writes about this in his letter to the church in Ephesus:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places...with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit...pray of my behalf that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains” (Eph. 6.10-12; 18, 19).

Ephesians is another prison letter from Paul requesting the same enablement as he prepares to go before Caesar for the defense and proclamation of the gospel. The prayer of the saints, coupled with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit (Spirit of Christ) are the necessary provisions for bold proclamation of the gospel.

With unashamed boldness (v.20): The provision of prayer and the Spirit’s provision is what keeps Paul from being unashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1.16). Paul expected that he would soon stand before Caesar and knew this could be the end of his life. But, instead of being “ashamed” he was filled with hope that whether by life or death, *“Christ will even now, as always, be exalted..”*

The word “shame” (v.20) means not to “shrink” or “be put to shame.” No matter the outcome, Paul’s disposition concerning his circumstance would not bring dishonor to Christ, if anything it will glorify Christ.

C. LIVE IT:

One of the ministries today that continues to keep us informed about those who are in prison for the cause of Christ is the “Voices of Martyrs” (VOM) ministry. On their webpage (persecution.com) they point out five reasons why they exist:

1. To encourage and empower Christians to fulfill the Great Commission in areas of the world where they are persecuted for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. To provide practical relief and spiritual support to the families of Christian martyrs.
3. To equip persecuted Christians to love and win to Christ those who are opposed to the gospel in their part of the world.
4. To undertake projects of encouragement, helping believers rebuild their lives and Christian witness in countries where they have formerly suffered oppression.
5. To promote the fellowship of all believers by informing the world of the faith and courage of persecuted Christians, thereby inspiring believers to a deeper level of commitment to Christ and involvement in His Great Commission.

This is not a promotion for the VOM, but a reminder that being persecuted for being a follower of Jesus Christ is still a real and serious matter around the world. Thousands are being thrown into prison, even brutally martyred for their faith. Yet, they are not ashamed, and joyfully and with hope know that they will be “delivered” by Christ whether they live or die, God will complete His “good work” in them.

CONCLUSION:

Several thoughts come to mind as we conclude this lesson:

1. What is your awareness of the progress of the gospel in the context of your world?
2. Are you making yourself available to the Lord, with boldness, trusting in Him with courage to share with others the gospel of Christ?
3. Do you rejoice with and pray for those who, whether free or in prison, are preaching Christ and Him crucified?
4. Do you shrink in fear or in shame because of Christ or have a hopeful expectation to exalt Him with your life and testimony of what He has done in you?

Jesus makes it clear, that *“if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.” Luke 9.23-24*

- Pray for those who are being persecuted.
- Trust in the Lord and His strength (Eph. 6.10).
- Boldly go and share the gospel of Christ with those God places in your life.
- No matter your circumstance, God can use your voice and life to proclaim the wondrous glories of Christ.

“Living and Dying for Christ Sake”

Lesson 4

Philippians 1.21-30

INTRO: The narrative in Acts 22-26 gives great insight to Paul’s prison journey. His arrest in Jerusalem, his trial, imprisonment in Jerusalem, Caesarea and to Rome. The case against Paul by the Jews before the Roman Governor, Felix in Caesarea was that Paul stirred up dissension among all the Jews, tried to desecrate the temple and is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect (Acts 24.1-6). Why this would be of interest to the Romans is that the religious freedom act was at stake for the Jews in the empire. Thereby, if the Jews were able to convince the courts that Paul and the Nazarene sect were dissenters in the empire they could not only have Paul executed, but also eradicate the Nazarenes by making their religion illegal to practice. The Jews presented themselves as peaceable people in the empire while these Christians were stirring up trouble (Acts 24.2b-6). In the end, Felix, Agrippa, and Festus saw that Paul “*committed nothing worthy of death*” (Acts 25.25a). But because he had made an “*appeal to the Emperor*” Paul was sent to Rome (Acts 25.25b).

What sort of man was the Emperor that Paul would face in Rome? His name was Nero. Infamous for persecuting Christians during Paul’s time. Even pinning the blame of the fire in Rome on the Christians in 64 A.D.. Paul, being told by the Lord that he must stand before Caesar (Acts 27.24) was uncertain of his fate after this meeting. Therefore, as Paul writes this prison letter to the Philippians, it was with great distressed, not because he was not looking forward to being executed, but because he was torn between going on to be with Christ or remaining in the flesh to fruitful labor in building up the church. This is the backdrop of our lesson today.

OVERVIEW: Paul declares his philosophy in life and his desire to be with Christ (vv. 21-23). At the same time he knows that remaining in the flesh would be more beneficial for progress and growth of the church (vv. 24-26). He then exhorts them to conduct themselves as citizens of God’s Kingdom and not be alarmed of those who oppose the gospel, but consider it a privilege to share in his sufferings for the sake of Christ (vv. 27-30).

THESIS: It is a privilege to suffer for the sake of Christ whether believers live or die.

I. CHRIST AS OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE (vv. 21-26)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 1.21-26

1. What matters most to Paul?
2. What was Paul’s dilemma?
3. Why would it be important for Paul to remain alive?

B. LEARN IT:

“*The Statement*” (v.21): What matters most to Paul is to live and/or die for Christ. His statement, “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain,*” summarizes Paul’s philosophy in life. His life revolved around Jesus Christ.

Christ was at the nucleus of everything that Paul was about, both personally or spiritually. Whether he would live or die, or the opinions of other people, saved or lost, this statement emphasizes the centrality of Christ in Paul's life and ministry. The prospect of seeing Christ Jesus, kneeling before him one day motivated Paul. While many live for money, family, fame, and success, Paul lived for Christ. Whether Caesar allowed Paul to live or die, it would be a win win situation for him. If he continued to live, he would live to work for the cause of Christ. If he were to die, he would be with Christ.

“Living for Jesus in the flesh” (v.22, 24): If Paul were to continue *“to live on in the flesh,”* what would his life look like? First, he says, *“this will mean fruitful labor for me” (v.22).*

“fruitful labor” (v.22): Paul saw living as an opportunity to serve Christ and to build up the church. If Paul's life were to be spared, he would continue to carry on as he had before. He would continue to “labor” for the cause of Christ. This labor would produce spiritual “fruit” for eternity. Since Christ was at the core of Paul's life and work, he would accomplish much, regardless his circumstance, whether free or in prison. Jesus told His disciples: *“I am the Vine, you are the branches he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15.5).* Paul certainly understood this for he writes later on in this letter: *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4.13).*

What would “fruitful labor” look like in Paul's life? Primarily the preaching and teaching of the gospel. The beginning and building up of the church. The discipling and training up of pastors and elders. It would be investing his life into godly men like Timothy. Sharing the gospel with people like Lydia. It would also mean confronting Satanic opposition and false teaching/doctrine. Paul would continue to face the ministry that was given to him by Christ, *“to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9.15).* This he would do for the benefit and confidence of the church (v.25-26).

The “necessary” ministry (v.23-26): Paul was in bit of a dilemma. He speaks of being *“hard pressed from both directions” (v.23).* Even though Paul would prefer to go on and be with the Lord, he knew that the Philippians would be the beneficiaries if he were to remain and continue on with them. So convinced of this, Paul knew for him to remain would mean their continued *“progress and joy in the faith” (v.25)* and that they would be encourage all the more if they were to be visited by him (v.26).

“I know I will remain” (v. 25): How is it that Paul knew he would remain? Paul had a sense that the legal case against him by his accusers was weak (cf. Acts 23.29; 25.25; 26.31-32). Paul could have also received some special revelation. What we do know is that the early church fathers indicate that Nero released Paul from his first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 62. Paul resumed his missionary work and returned to Macedonia,

probably to Philippi. However, the Romans arrested him again, imprisoned Paul in Rome a second time, and then executed him there as a martyr in A.D. 68. Paul possibly did contribute to a the spiritual “progress and joy” of the Philippians in their faith as he said he expected he would.

C. LIVE IT:

What do you live for? What is at the center of your motivation for living? Obviously, not all cannot be like Paul, but there is prescriptive language that calls believers to place Christ at the center of their lives. Every word we speak. Every deed we do. Paul says, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father*” (Col. 3.17). This means our marriage, families, work, and relationships (Eph. 5.21-6.9). All these areas should have a Christ centric focus. Because, apart from Christ we can not bear any fruit that is acceptable for God’s Kingdom and eternity. Certainly you would want to hear these words from Christ, “*well done, good and faithful slave*” (Matt. 25.23). Our lives will be tested and our work will become evident as it is revealed by fire. This refining fire of the Lord will “*test the quality of each man’s work*” (1 Cor. 3.13). Therefore, live for Jesus each day and moment He gives you to glorify His glorious name.

II. CHRIST AS OUR REWARD IN DEATH (vv. 21-26)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read again, Philippians 1.21-26

1. What would be better than living for Paul?
2. Why would dying be better for Paul than living? (List some reasons - your thoughts)

B. LEARN IT:

“*To die is gain*” (v. 21): John Piper has this to say about Paul’s phrase here: “Death is gain because death means more of Christ, and he’s better than anything this life can give us.” Jim Harbaugh, while coaching the San Francisco 49ers a few years back had a catch phrase he repeated with his players in the locker room. It goes like this: “Who has it better than us?” Paul would say, only those who are now in glory with Christ! The prospect of seeing Jesus Christ, and standing before Him one day, drew Paul, and constituted the goal for all he did. The word “gain” can also be rendered as “advantage” or “lucre.” Death is “advantageous” for the believer. In Paul’s view, if the Emperor verdict was death, Paul would be better off than if he continued to live. He would go into the presence of His Lord and Savior. He would be free from sin, suffering, and sorrow. Furthermore, he would have glorified God by persevering to the end of his life. John Piper again, points out in one of his sermons, “Five Reasons Death is Gain for Believers”:

1. *Our spirits will be made perfect (Hebrews 12.22-23).* God will make complete what He had promised that He will complete His good work in us. The writer of Hebrews tells us that when we die and enter the city of the living God, enrolled in heaven... “*the spirits of the righteous (are) made perfect.*” The Lord will complete His sanctifying work through

His Son. What you could not do, God will make perfect. Because nothing imperfect cannot enter into His Kingdom.

2. *We will be relieved of the pain of this world (Luke 16.24-25).* Jesus here tells a parable concerning the Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man had a good life while Lazarus a poor life. When both died, the rich man went to hell and Lazarus to be with the Lord. The rich man was in agonizing torment and wanted the Lord to have mercy by allowing Lazarus to dip his finger in water to touch the tip of his tongue because he was in agony. The Lord responded by saying: “*remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here and you are in agony.*”
3. *We will be given a profound rest in our soul (Rev. 6.9-11).* When believers die, they will not only be with the Lord, but also find rest for a little while longer from their suffering.
4. *We will experience a deep at-homeness with the Lord (2 Cor. 5.8).* Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be in paradise that day with Christ. Paul reminds us here that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.
5. *We will be with Christ (Phil. 1.21-23).* Here again is the promise that where Christ is, we will also be. Jesus Himself tells His disciples that “*where I am, there you may be also*” (John 14.3b).

C. LIVE IT:

Why is death gain for Paul and the Christian? Death is gain because we will all be with Christ in heaven for ever. This is what the progress of the gospel is all about. This is why We “defend and confirm” the gospel. This is why missionaries are martyred. This is why Christians are persecuted. We stand steadfast to the truth of the gospel against the Satanic forces because to be with Christ is better than anything this life can give or offer to us.

The gospel, eternity, salvation, the glories of heaven and the Kingdom of God are just a few reasons why Christians should stand united together and strain for the upward call and prize of Christ. While Christ is our purpose in life, He is our reward in death. Therefore, make your pledge to Him alone.

III. CHRIST AS OUR PLEDGE FOR LIVING AND DYING (vv. 27-30)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 1.27-30

1. How are (1.27) and Ephesians 4.1-6 similar?
2. What is at stake?
3. Who should the Philippians not be alarmed by?
4. What has been granted to the Philippians and for what cause?

B. LEARN IT:

“Worthy conduct” (v.27): Paul really gets to the heart of this letter here. Primarily, “the Christian life is not a playground; it is a battleground” (Wiersbe). In Ephesians, Paul exhorts the believers *“to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph. 4.1)*. Here Paul exhorts the Philippians to “conduct” themselves *“in a worthy manner of the gospel” (1.27)*. The word “conduct” means “to live as a citizen.” Meaning then, as those who are called by Christ, live like a citizen of the Kingdom of God. This means behave well. Speak well. Pledge yourself to the cause of Christ and His gospel. Represent it well. Take great pride in who you are in Christ, and live like it.

The Philippians, like most Christians are citizens of two kingdoms. They were citizens of Rome and citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Both are important, but for the Christian, heavenly citizenship is far more important. As such, they needed to be “standing firm in one spirit.” Unified together with “one mind.” Unity in the church is necessary so believers can “strive” together to carry out the will of God effectively. This being to proclaim and promote the Christian faith in the gospel message. Thus, the church needs to possess two essential qualities: unity and steadfastness against the enemies of the gospel (Swift).

“The enemies of the gospel” (v.28): From the very beginning, there has always been opposition to the gospel. It is the goal of the enemy to frighten and detract believers from proclaiming the gospel. Paul exhorts the Philippians not to be intimidated by those who oppose the gospel. The word “alarmed” is made up of two Greek words (ptyo - spit) and (ptoeo - to scare or fall). When I think of this word, I think of “fainting goats.” These are goats that if you yell or scare them, their legs tense and they fall over out of fear. Paul, is essentially saying, don’t be like fainting goats. Don’t allow the enemies of the gospel “alarm” you.

The enemies of the gospel in this case (cf. vv. 15,17) seem to have been outside the church, but exactly who they were is unknown. Probably all external opponents to the work of God are in view, or possibly again, the Judaizers. By not showing fear would be consider a victory and salvation for the church and *“a sign of destruction for them” (v. 28b)*.

“God’s grace and the believer’s pledge” (vv.29-30): All believers have received a gracious gift from God. It is the privilege of suffering for Jesus Christ (for His sake). The word “granted” in the Greek comes from the word “charis” which means “grace.” Suffering is one of the tools God uses to mold His children into vessels that bring glory to his Son (cf. James 1.3-4; 1 Pet. 1.6-7). Suffering even perfected the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2.10).

The believers were experiencing the same type of suffering Paul endured (v.30). They had witnessed first hand his struggles in Philippi when he had planted the church there. They had also heard of his sufferings in Rome (2.26).

C. LIVE IT:

Paul is not asking the Philippian believers to do something he himself had not done. He was urging them to unite with one another, and with him. To view suffering for their faith as a privilege that would glorify Christ.

Paul is calling on contemporary believers to the same pledge. To make Christ your pledge to live and die for His sake and cause for the gospel. To defend and confirm the truth about Christ, His death and resurrection.

What pledge have you made to Christ? How far are you willing to go with Christ? Have you pledged to stand and be united with other believers not for your rights, but for the cause and liberty of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

CONCLUSION:

At the conclusion of his trial, John Bunyan could only rest in the sovereign will of God. Read his words as he reflects on his trial while in prison:

“Thus have I, in short, declared the manner and occasion of my being in prison; where I lie waiting the good will of God, to do with me as he please the; knowing that not one hair of my head can fall to the ground without the will of my Father which is in heaven. Let the rage and malice of men be never so great, they can do no more, nor go no further, than God permits them; but when they have done their worst, ‘we know that all thing work together for good to them that love God’ (Rom. 8.28). Farewell.” - John Bunyan, “The Complete Works of John Bunyan”

What brings peace concerning this testimony is that men can go no further than God permits. Even if it means death for us, all things work together for good for those who love God, even death, because death in Christ is better than anything this world gives us.

“The Humble and Steadfast Christian”

Lesson 5

Philippians 2.1-18

INTRO: Andrew Murray once wrote, “The humble man feels no jealousy or envy. He can praise God when others are preferred and blessed before him. He can bear to hear others praised while he is forgotten because he has received the spirit of Jesus, who pleased not Himself, and how he sought not His own honor. Therefore, in putting on the Lord Jesus Christ he has put on the heart of compassion, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, and humility.”

This section of Paul’s letter shares the same sentiment. Paul’s desire is for the Philippians to take on the same attitude that of Christ. An attitude of humility in steadfast service.

THESIS: The responsibility of the Christian is to be like Christ in humble and steadfast service.

OVERVIEW: Paul appeals for unity and humility (2.1-4). Paul points to Christ as the supreme example of humility (vv. 5-11). Paul then calls for the church to shine as lights in the world and to rejoice by holding fast to the gospel and in the suffering they face (vv. 12-18).

I. THE APPEAL TO THE BELIEVERS (2.1-4)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 2.1-4

1. Paul points out four incentives for humility, list what they are? (v.1)
2. What four things did Paul command the Philippians to do? (vv.2-4)
3. What do all these things promote in the church?

B. LEARN IT:

“Four incentives for humility” (v.1): Paul makes an appeal to the Philippian believers to remain humble and steadfast. In doing so he gives them four conditional incentives why they should be submissive to God. They are:

1. *“If there is any encouragement in Christ”* - Paul’s first incentive for humility is based on the teachings of Christ. His teachings should urge believers to practice selfless acts. Paul appeals to the Philippians to heed Christ’s commands as if they were issued by Christ personally. What teachings of Christ would Paul be thinking of:
 - *Mark 9.35 “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”*
 - *Luke 7.11 “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*
 - *Matthew 20:26-28 “...but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

2. *“If there is any consolation of love”* - Next, Paul speaks of another form of encouragement. To console is to speak to one another. How are they to speak to one another? In love. Using words of comfort for the express purpose to strengthen one another in Christ. “In Christ” speaks to one’s faith in Him. By placing your faith in Him alone in such context is to cause one to be courageous. These encouraging words in Christ is what consoles the believer who is suffering and is anxious.

3. *“If there is any fellowship of the Holy Spirit”* - There is some disagreement by scholars as to what Paul means here. But, in some instances some render this phrase as “spiritual fellowship.” Meaning this, we have something in common with Christ’s Spirit. The word “fellowship” in the Greek is “koinonia,” which means “fellowship, participation, sharing, and contribution.” This incentive reminds us of our common participation in Christ. This common ground is what our union in Christ is built upon. When you read about the ingathering fellowship in Acts 2.42-47, you witness what these incentives are about as the newly formed church devoted themselves to the *“apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread and to prayer”* (v. 42). The humility demonstrated out of love was applied to everyone giving up of themselves so that no one was without need (v.45). This is what Christian fellowship and community should be about.

4. *“If any affection and compassion”* - The final incentive concerning Paul’s appeal for humility comes from the heart. Actually, the word for “affection” is “splagchnon.” It describes the inward organs of the human body. The bowels of the person such as the heart, liver, lungs, intestines, etc. This love and affection is not just lip service, it truly comes from the gut and poured through mercy. Paul tells the Colossians: *“as those who have been chosen by God, holy and beloved, put on a HEART OF COMPASSION, kindness, gentleness and patience”* (Col. 3.12). These are the deep feelings for one another laced with merciful compassion and kindness. Another words, deep “sympathy.”

“Four Commands for Humility” (vv.2-4): Paul’s goal was he wanted his readers to be “one” in their attitudes and purpose. Why? So they could fulfill God’s purpose for them, individually and as a church. The result would bring Paul great “joy.” The first is the readers should maintain “love” for one another. The second is they should maintain unity “in spirit” and in “purpose.” The third, they should view other people as “more important than” themselves (cf. 1.17) and not do anything out of “selfishness or empty conceit.” The final and fourth command is they should consider the “interests” and matters of one another, not just their own.

C. LIVE IT:

A way this is lived out is by looking out for the needs of our families (1 Tim. 5.8) and in a broader context, our Christian family too (John 13.34).

By heeding to the commands of Christ, humbling ourselves to serve others demonstrates a right attitude and mindset of Christian love and servitude. This can only be done in Christ, by faith, with deep affection for the body of Christ.

When believers put their own interest behind and place the interest of others in the forefront, there is no room for division. Unity will thrive because pride is removed. We view life from the other person's perspective, not our own. Our desire is to see them thrive in Christ and in life. When believers accomplish acts of tender kindness towards one another, they are fulfilling the commands of Christ.

The supreme example of this humility is not by words, but by action through Christ Jesus our Lord.

II. THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST (2.5-11)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 2.5-11

1. What kind of "attitude" did Paul want the Philippians to have?
2. How did Paul illustrate this attitude? (vv. 6-9).
3. How would God use Christ's example? (vv. 10-11)

B. LEARN IT:

Some scholars indicate that the illustration of Christ that Paul uses comes from an early church hymn. Whether or not verses 6-11 is an early Christian hymn, Paul wanted his readers to remember that "this attitude," the very quality he had been appealing, was observed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Have the same mind in Christ" (vv. 5-6): The word "attitude" is "phroneo" in the Greek. It means to exercise the mind. To entertain or have an opinion. It is also used, as is here in this verse, to be of the same mind. To agree together by cherishing the same views. Paul uses this word in verse 2, *"by being of the same mind."* Here Paul is re-emphasizing his appeal to be harmonious in thought and attitude. His appeal again is based upon the same mind and teaching that was "in Christ." This is not Paul's original idea, but only pointing out that believers should be on the same page as Christ.

What should they agree on:

Grasp the understanding of what it means to be a servant (v.6) - When Jesus came into this world, He "existed" as fully God and fully man (John 1.1-4; 14-18). Jesus has always been God, just as much as the Father and the Holy Spirit has always been God. The harmonious union concerning the Trinity will always be a wonder and a mystery to behold. Yet, the early church understood from the gospels that Jesus, the Son, did not stop being God when He took on human flesh, He *"emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant."* The word "emptied" means "to make empty." Meaning, Christ laid aside equality (or privilege) in the form of God to take on the *"form of a bond-servant."* What does this mean? Jesus Christ "did not regard" His former existence as something He needed to grasp on to because He already possessed it. Therefore, Jesus willfully

altered His form for the welfare of others by laying aside the Godhead privileges to give us a true example of submissiveness for us. “Jesus’ true nature is characterized not by selfish grabbing, but by an open-handed giving” (Hawthorn). What is Paul emphasizing? Jesus’ self-sacrificing mercy. But, to be clear, Jesus did not cease to be God when He became a man (John 10.30; Col. 15-20). His dependence on the Father in terms of “Son” and “Father” reflects the submissiveness of the “Son” in relationship to the “Father’s” will (Luke 22.42).

“Taking on the form of a bond-servant” (v.7) - The word “taking” (labon) does not mean to exchange, but to add on to something. This help us understand better that Jesus did not exchange being man for God, but added to His deity the form of man by becoming a humble servant for those He came to save. An example of Jesus taking on this role is when He washed the disciples feet before the last supper. This was a task reserved for the lowliest of slaves in the household (John 13.1-17). What is the significance of this? For Jesus, it was the display of His humility and His servanthood. For Jesus to wash their feet was in direct contrast to their heart attitudes at that time.

“Christ’s appearance and obedience to death on a cross” (v. 8) - The appearance Jesus as a man was just like any other man. Listen to Isaiah’s depiction of the suffering servant, Christ: *“He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him” (Isa. 53.2b)*. What Isaiah depicts for us is yet another aspect of Jesus’ humility. There were no visual clues in His “appearance” that He was either sinless or divine. He was just found to be in the form of a common man.

Jesus’ humility moves further and deeper by becoming obedient to death. Consider Christ, the Creator of all life (John 1.1-4; Col. 1.16-17), who became “obedient” to the Father’s will to the point of “laying down His life in death” (cf. Isa. 53.12; Heb. 5.8). This is the ultimate and supreme depiction of humility.

“The exaltation of Christ” (vv. 9-11) - In view of the Son’s submission to the depths of humiliation on the cross, God the Father in exchange, raised Him to the height of exaltation. The Father literally, “super-exalted” (hyperypsosen) Jesus. This process included Jesus’ resurrection, ascension, and glorification in heaven.

The “name” that the Father has given to Jesus, that “is above every name” is evidently “Lord Jesus,” as verses 10-11 suggest. The contrast from “humble submission” to “super-exaltation,” would have had an unusual impact on Paul’s readers. Yet, the purpose of the Father to exalt Jesus above all who are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, places Christ on the same level of authority found in Exodus 20.3, where God prohibited everyone from worshipping anyone but Himself.

C. LIVE IT:

The verbal confession of Jesus' Lordship accompanies symbolic physical submission. Every being that has a tongue and can speak will acknowledge Jesus as Lord. To be clear, this is not speaking of universal salvation, but that in the last days, when all has been said and done, there will come a time when everyone will acknowledge and confess Christ Jesus as Lord. The horrifying and terrible prospect is that for many this great super-exaltation will be too late.

What is needed now is to make a plea to those who have not received Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. What is needed is for them to repent from their sin of unbelief in Christ to confess with their mouths and believe in their hearts that Jesus, the humble servant and Son of the God, died and rose again (1 Cor. 15.3-5; Romans 10.9-10, 13).

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BELIEVERS (2.12-18)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 2.12-18

1. What should believers work hard on? (v.12) Why and how?
2. How should believers act among non-believers? (vv. 14-15)
3. What should believers hang on to? (v.16)
4. What does Paul urge the believers to do? (v.18).

B. LEARN IT:

Paul now goes from making an appeal of humility by using Christ as a supreme example, to urging them to make a worthy response to follow his example in Christ.

"Work out your salvation" (vv. 12-13) - Paul's concern here is with the eternal welfare of the soul of the individual. Paul is concerned about the spiritual growth of the church. This includes its spiritual health and wholeness.

Basically, this is called "sanctification." Sanctification is the process by which one is being made or becoming holy. To sanctify is to literally "set apart for particular use." In this case, for the purpose and will of God. As we work out our own salvation (sanctification), we must remember certain things: We serve a holy God, we have a strong and crafty adversary, and we are weak and dependent on God for all that we need. Such awareness will produce the attitude of "fear and trembling" that Paul advocated.

What Paul is speaking of is spiritual warfare. Our battle is not with flesh and blood, or against one another, but against our adversary, Satan and his forces (Eph. 6.12). Therefore, Paul urges his readers to work their salvation out with total dependency on God for it is He who will complete His work in them (v.13).

"Be blameless and innocent" (vv. 14-15) - One of the challenges in the process of sanctification is avoiding what our flesh so easily gives into, "grumbling and disputing." This usually happens because one, we are not taking on the "mind of Christ."

In his book, “Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands,” Paul Tripp outlines for his readers “Why do we fight so much?” Here is how he explains it:

- Desire: I wish for something that I do not have.
- Demand: Therefore, I will do what I can to get what I do not have.
- Need: I must get what I do not have because I need it.
- Expectation: Therefore, you should give me what I want.
- Disappointment: But because you did not give me what I want, I will punish you. Therefore, I will not give you what you want or I will take out my disappointment out on you.

James 4.1 tells us where do arguments come from: “*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*”

To be “blameless and innocent” is to be void of selfish pride. When we become selfish in our attitude, Paul says we “do all things (with) grumbling or disputing” (v. 14). Paul then challenges them to “*prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent.*” How does one “prove” themselves? By “appearing” to be a strong witness to the light of Christ in a “*crooked and perverse generation.*” Believers ought to have a godly influence that seasons that distasteful culture with Christ. They are to reflect the light of Christ, not allowing their light be shaded by sin or uncleanness (cf. Matt. 5.15-16).

“*Hold fast the word of life*” (v. 16) - Next, the responsibility of the believer is to hold on tight to the gospel (John 6.68). Paul wanted the Philippians to continue to serve faithfully so that when he stood before the judgement seat of Christ (cf. 1.6, 10) he would have cause for justifiable pride (cf. 1.26). His investment in them would not have been in vain.

“*Rejoice with me*” (vv. 17-18) - The prospect of death was clearly in Paul’s mind. He viewed himself as a “drink offering” (ref: to Israel worship, cf. 2 Tim. 4.6; Num. 15.1-10; 28.4-7). This offering took place when the priest offered a lamb as a burnt offering, he poured wine beside the altar. This would have been the last act in the sacrificial ceremony. Paul’s analogy here depicts the gradual ebbing away of his life that had been a living sacrifice to God since his conversion.

Paul’s perspective of joy is found in his sacrificial service to God in contributing to the Philippians coming to faith and service to the Lord. In return, like Paul, they had offered themselves as acceptable offerings to God (Rom. 12.1). To this, Paul urges them not to sorrow over their own trials and his, but to rejoice as they worked out their own salvation, adopting his attitude toward their situation in life, They could “share” their “joy with” Paul as they communicated with him, and assured him of their joy in the Lord.

C. LIVE IT:

Thomas Chisholm writes in his hymn, “Living for Jesus” that the only “pathway of blessing” for the believer is to live for Jesus. He reminds us that it is a life that is “true,” a life we “strive to please him in all that we do,” as we “yield our allegiance glad hearted and free.”

When Jesus took on the form of a bond-servant, you certainly see these qualities. He lived a life that was true to the Father’s will. He strived to please the Father in all that He did, even yielding His allegiance to the Father’s will, even to the point of death.

As believers take on the mind of Christ, you take on His humility to serve the interest of others, most importantly the Father’s interest, not self.

Therefore, rejoice and do not complain. Submit yourself to the Father in all that you do in word and deed, thereby glorifying and exalting the name of Jesus, Whose name is above all names.

“Personal Examples of Servanthood”

Lesson 6

Philippians 2.19-30

INTRO: In November 1963, on the same day that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, another important person in history died - Clive Staples Lewis. This man had a profound affect on many generations through his prolific writings and books of Christian fiction, children stories and others that flowed from his pen. He was an Oxford scholar who had converted from atheism to Christianity. His books have been used by God in the conversion of many, which included a politician and a Noble Prize-winning scientist. The author I am speaking of is none other than C.S. Lewis.

Some of us are called to proclaim to others about Christ, but all of us are called to be “epistles,” or “living letters” of Christ in the way we live out our faith. Paul writes to the church in Corinth this statement: *“You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tables of stone but on tablets of human hearts”* (2 Cor. 3.2-3).

BACKGROUND: To the Philippians, Paul uses two such living letters of Christ as personal examples of servanthood. He holds them in such high regard that he planned to send these two brothers of faith to encourage the church in Philippi and to receive a report on their well-being. The two men he planned to send were his child in the faith, Timothy and his brother in the faith, Epaphroditus.

THESIS: The church needs living examples of servanthood to encourage the partnership of the gospel.

I. THE EXAMPLE OF TIMOTHY (2.19-24)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 2.19-24.

1. Paul was planning to send Timothy to Philippi for what reasons?
2. Why did Paul choose Timothy over the others from Rome?
3. What was Paul’s hope in the near future?

B. LEARN IT:

Background on Timothy: Timothy is one of Paul’s better known companions. He is introduced in Acts 16 when Paul comes to Derbe and Lystra which were located in the Galatian region of central modern day Turkey (Acts 16.1). While visiting there, Paul meets a young man who is *“well spoken of by the brethren”* (Acts 16.2). Timothy was born into a mixed family. His father was a Greek and his mother a Jewish woman named, Eunice. Along with his mother, Timothy was raised from childhood by his Jewish grandmother, Lois. Both women were believers (2 Tim. 1.5) who taught Timothy the ways and wisdom of the Lord through the Old Testament Scriptures. It was through

these Scriptures that Timothy came to understand “*the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim. 3.15).

Timothy is known by Paul to be his child in the faith, which would seem to indicate that he was converted at the time of Paul’s first missionary visit to Lystra and Derbe (1 Tim. 1.2; 1 Cor. 4.17). Since Timothy was well spoken of by the brethren, Paul chose him to be one of his companions for the duration of his second and third missionary journeys. Paul had him circumcised before they departed because of the Jews in those parts (Acts 16.3).

Timothy would be discipled and serve along side Paul. The apostle dispatched Timothy to the churches in Thessalonica, Macedonia and Corinth. Paul also gave Timothy pastoral duties in Ephesus that he might attend to the needs of the church (1 Tim. 1.3). Two of the pastoral letters by Paul bear Timothy’s name. They were written to encourage Timothy while shepherding the church in Ephesus (1 & 2 Timothy). While Paul awaited his pending execution during his second imprisonment in Rome, he calls for Timothy to visit him, and to bring his cloak and books (2 Tim. 4.13,21).

According to church historian, Eusebius, Timothy was the first bishop of Ephesus and according to Nicephorus, Timothy was clubbed to death at a feast of Diana for denouncing their licentious ways (John Phillips Commentary, Vol. 27).

When writing to the Philippians, Paul hoped to send Timothy to them so that he could bring back encouraging words concerning his friends there. Many in Philippi would have known Timothy since he had been with Paul when he founded the church (Acts 16/14-15).

“*Timothy’s genuine concern*” (vv. 19-21) - The purpose of sending Timothy was to “learn” of their “condition” (v.19). There was no one better for Paul to send who was more loved and trusted than Timothy. Timothy would have their best interest at heart and would accurately represent their situation to Paul (v.20). The problem wasn’t that there was no one else to send, the issue centered around the self-interest disposition among some of the believers in Rome. Not only did they not have a personal relationship with the church in Philippi, but the motives would not be for the good of the church. Therefore, Paul could not recommend them and chose Timothy instead (v.21; 1.15; 2.3).

“*Timothy’s proven worth*” (vv. 22-24) - In contrast to most believers in Rome, Timothy demonstrated his worthiness as a servant of Christ and of Paul over more than 10 years. He served as Paul’s fellow worker and protege. He had established a good and worthy reputation, not only in Philippi, but wherever he had served (v.22)

Paul had anticipated that he would soon be released and would visit them “shortly,” In the mean time, Lord willing, Paul wanted to “send” Timothy to Philippi with a report of the apostle’s situation and plans “immediately” (vv. 23-24)

C. LIVE IT:

Wiersbe states, that “the submissive mind is not the product of an hour’s sermon, or a week’s seminar, or even a year’s service. The submissive mind grows in us as, like Timothy, we yield to the Lord and seek to serve others.”

The true example of servanthood is not what you do in front of people as much as what you do consistently behind the scenes. Joseph is a good example of servanthood. The worthiness of Joseph’s example is witness by his trust in the Lord no matter the circumstance. His service to the Lord’s purpose was faithfully the same as a slave, a prisoner, and prince.

Consider these questions of application:

1. Who has modeled selfless Christian service before you and others?
2. How have you imitated their actions?
3. How have you imitated Christ, Paul and Timothy?

II. THE EXAMPLE OF EPAPHRODITUS (2.25-30)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 2.25-30.

1. Who was Epaphroditus to Paul? List how Paul related to him personally.
2. Why was Epaphroditus “longing” to go back to Philippi?
3. Why was Paul willing to send him back?
4. How did Paul want the Philippians to view Epaphroditus and for what reason?

B. LEARN IT:

Background of Epaphroditus: Epaphroditus is only mentioned briefly in the New Testament, Philippians 2.25. He was a fellow worker of Paul and a delegate from the church at Philippi who brought him gifts during his first imprisonment at Rome. He is called by Paul as his “*brother, and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister in my need*” (v.25).

Paul had nothing but praise for this little known warrior of the faith. The reason for this praise by Paul is probably that both men shared a common bond in grace as brothers in Christ. They were “fellow workers” who joined together in the service of building up of the church of Christ as partners. They were fellow “soldiers” of Christ. Epaphroditus was not simply a believer, but a Christian warrior who entered into spiritual warfare, by standing up for Christ in a hostile environment, and boldly proclaiming the gospel. Lastly, in relation to the Philippians, he was their “messenger” to Paul bearing their gifts, doing what the Philippian church was unable to do themselves.

In reciprocating their gracious use of Epaphroditus, Paul sends him back to the Philippians to encourage them, because they had heard of how the Lord had mercy on Epaphroditus because he was greatly ill, even to the point of death. His return would bring them joy because of the news of his sickness had “distressed” them (vv. 25-27).

“Epaphroditus’s genuine concern (vv. 25-28) - Like Timothy, Epaphroditus would have had a genuine concern for his fellow believers in Philippi. Paul stated he was not only sending him to encourage them, but because Epaphroditus “was longing for” them all and felt bad that the news of his sickness brought distress on them (v.26). God’s mercy on him would not only bring comfort to the church in Philippi, but it brought great comfort to Paul too as Epaphroditus’s death would have brought sorrow to Paul (v.27). His return would be a time of rejoicing and less stress on Paul knowing they would receive him with joy and “hold men like him in high regard” (vv.28-29).

“Epaphroditus’s proven worth (vv. 29-30) - Why does Paul ask the Philippians to hold Epaphroditus up in “high regard” (v.29)? Because, “he came close to death for the work of Christ” (v.30a). He risked his life “to complete what was deficient in” their “service” to Paul. Meaning this: Epaphroditus had daringly exposed himself to danger by ministering to Paul. It was because of this this labor he became ill. Some seem to indicate that his illness was not because of persecution, but because of overexertion (Deissmann).

C. LIVE IT:

While Timothy demonstrated faithful and consistent service, Epaphroditus demonstrated a sacrificial service for the cause of Christ. Both proven and held in high regard according to Paul’s standards.

I believe I have mentioned this verse before, yet, I will mention it again. Jesus’ definition of Christian discipleship is based on giving up of self to follow Him. Jesus states: *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” (Luke 9.23-26)*

As much as we should hold up God our Father and our Savior, Christ Jesus our Lord, we should also have a high regard for Christians who sacrificially serve the Lord for His cause, His glory and His church. In most cases, the standard of Christian service has drifted down to the level of subpar normalcy. We are all called as followers of Christ to uphold the walk of Christ in a worthy manner. Walk in the likeness of Christ and you will meet Paul’s standard of Christian living and service.

III. CONCLUSION:

As compassionate and loving as we like to picture our Savior and God to be, He does expect a standard of servanthood and humility that He holds in high regard, just as Paul did in pointing out Timothy and Epaphroditus.

May you hear from Jesus when your life is done those glorious words that bring glory and honor to Him alone: *“Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; Enter into the joy of your master”* (Matt. 25.21).

Is this not what your goal in life should be? To please your Lord and Master so you may enter into His joy when your life is completed here on earth. I pray this is your goal in life to serve the Lord with all your heart so that you may serve others out of love and for the glory of Christ.

Paul’s plan was to encourage the body of Christ to serve one another and to continue with the ongoing work of the gospel. By holding Timothy and Epaphroditus up in high regard, Paul sets the standard for humble service in the church.

“True Righteousness Verses False Righteousness”

Lesson 7

Philippians 3.1-11

INTRO: In Luke 18.9-14, Jesus tells a parable concerning a Pharisee and a Tax collector. He *“told this parable to some people who trust in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt”* (v.9). The story below is a retelling of the parable by Timothy Reynolds.

“An elder arrived early for the service and sat down on the other side of the chapel from a young lad he’d never seen before. He looked like one of the gang members that hung around outside the swimming pool being a nuisance on their skate boards. The elder bowed his head to pray as he always did and said, ‘Thank you, Lord, that by your grace I have been kept from that sort of life and was a member of the church and had a good job by the time I was this guy’s age.’ The young lad didn’t even look up, but just bowed his head and humbly spoke and said, ‘God, I don’t know why I’m here, I know I am a sinner and need you. Please forgive me of my sins and for ignoring you.’

The lesson in this story is that Jesus taught that the one who exalted himself was not justified by God, but the one who humbled himself before the Lord was. Jesus’ point is that religious works do not justify anyone. Justification comes to those who are humble before the Lord, seeking mercy and grace. Justification, then is not based on one’s own merit, but by the merit of God’s grace through works of righteousness of Jesus Christ our Lord. This is jest of Paul’s point in Philippians 3 concerning true and false righteousness.

OVERVIEW: Paul’s emphasis in chapter 2 was on the importance of unity and humility. For true partnership to exist in the work of the gospel, there must be unity among the workers. The key was to adopt the humble mind of Christ.

Now, Paul turns to another aspect of humility by putting *“no confidence in the flesh”* (v.3). He calls on the church to rejoice in suffering, but beware of those who preach confidence in the flesh, namely the Judaizers. They claimed you must first become a Jew through circumcision to be justified before the Lord. This teaching obviously opposes the true circumcision of the heart, which puts no confidence in the flesh. Thus, Paul seeks to help the church in Philippi to be steadfast against those who oppose the true circumcision that comes by faith in Christ verses the false circumcision in the flesh.

THESIS: All things gained in regards to earthly righteousness should be counted as loss for the value of knowing Christ who is our true righteousness. There is nothing we can do to merit God’s grace. Salvation is found only in the true righteousness in Christ alone.

I. THE SAFEGUARD WE HAVE IN CHRIST (3.1-6)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 3.1-6.

1. Why is “rejoicing in the Lord” a “safeguard” for a believers? In other words, what does “rejoicing” keep us “safe” from?
2. Why does Paul seem to speak harshly against those who are of the “false circumcision”?
3. Why does Paul not put confidence in his own flesh?

B. LEARN IT:

The word “*finally*” seems to indicate that Paul’s letter is coming to its near conclusion. But, if you have been in church for some time you know that many preachers make the same statement only to go on with other points before the concluding their message. This is by no means Paul’s final point. He is bringing to conclusion the importance of humility which he wrote about in the first two chapters.

“*Rejoice in the Lord*” (3.1) - Paul starts by exhorting his readers to “rejoice in the Lord” even in the midst of opposition to the work of the gospel (v.1). Joy is the recurring theme in this letter. Paul rejoices in his circumstance, knowing good will come from it (1.18). Paul rejoices in having confidence he will remain with them for a little while longer for their sake (1.25). Paul rejoices at the prospect of unity they have in Christ (2.1-2). He rejoices because of their faith even with the prospect of death looming over him and calls on them to rejoice with him (2.17, 18). Paul also seeks to encourage the church with joy by sending them Timothy and Epaphroditus (2.19,28). Then, later in chapter 4, the theme of joy prevails as Paul describes them as being his “joy” and to be joyful in the Lord always (4.1,4, 10, 18).

Why is remaining joyful in the Lord important? Because of the kill-joys in life. Namely, those who oppose the true message of the gospel, the false teachers. Jesus describes Satan and his work as a “thief” who “*comes only to steal and kill and destroy*” (Jn. 10.10). To be joyful in the Lord becomes a “safeguard” for believers against the opposition. Why is this? Because your joy comes from Christ, not from anything else in life, including the flesh. Therefore, Paul does not mind sounding like a broken record by repeating, “rejoice in the Lord.” In other words, “it is not tiresome to me to repeat what is “safe” for you” (A.T. Robertson).

“*Warning against the flesh*” (3.2-3) - Who are these joy killers? Those who oppose the true gospel and work of Christ. Here, Paul warns his readers to “beware” of those who teach a false righteousness that comes from the flesh (v.2). He describes them as “dogs, evil workers” and their practice of “false circumcision.” Who is he pointing out? The Judaizers. If you feel that Paul seems harsh in calling these antagonist names, Jesus and the other prophets used the term “dogs” to refer to opponents of God’s truth (cf. Matt. 7.6; Deut. 12.18; 1 Sam. 17.43; Isa. 56.10-11). Dogs in the ancient times were unclean, wild, and vicious animals that threatened the safety of everyone.

The work of the Judaizers was considered by Paul to be “evil.” This stresses the character of their labors. The Judaizers emphasized “circumcision” because it was the rite that brought a person into Judaism, which they viewed as a prerequisite for justification (Acts 15.1). The act of “circumcision” was the wrong reason for justification, thus they were simply “mutilating” the body for no reason with no benefit.

Paul points out that true believers belong to a different camp, that of the “true circumcision.” He is referring to those who from the heart, place their trust in Christ alone for salvation. This is the circumcision of the heart, not the flesh. To circumcise is to trust in ones flesh and rite-keeping for salvation (cf. Rom. 2.25-29; Col. 2.11). The Bible forbids self-mutilation, such as castration and the like (Lev. 21.5), therefore Paul is saying, these Jews think they are circumcised, but they are really only mutilating themselves (Barclay). Thus, Paul indicates they are putting confidence in their flesh rather than Christ.

“Not righteous enough” (3.4-6) - Because of this, Paul proceeds to explain to the Philippians why he has spoken so harshly against the Jews (vv. 4-11). It is because “confidence in the flesh” cannot provide the righteousness that God requires (v.9). He proceeds to use himself as an example. Paul cites seven personal advantages “in the flesh.” The first four being things he inherited (v. 5) and the last three were things he chose by conviction (vv. 5e-6). These were things the Judaizers claimed were necessary for justification, but Paul did not trust in them because he knew his righteousness was not enough to give him a justified standing before God. He still needed Christ’s righteousness. It is only through His work and our faith in Him that we are able to stand before God justified (Rom. 3.21-26).

C. LIVE IT:

Believers who are more prone to rejoice do so because they are not putting confidence in personal works for salvation. Their trust is in the Lord.

One of my favorite songs some years ago was written by Twila Paris, the verses go like this:

*“The joy of the Lord will be my strength
I will not falter, I will not faint
He is my Shepherd, I am not afraid
The joy of the Lord is my strength*

*The joy of the Lord will be my strength
He will uphold me all of my days
I am surrounded by mercy and grace
And the joy of the Lord is my strength*

*The joy of the Lord will be my strength
And I will not waiver, walking by faith
He will be strong to deliver me safe
And the joy of the Lord is my strength.*

You can never be justified before God base on your own merit of works. Only by the unmerited favor of God through Christ Jesus our Lord is one justified. This is where our joy comes from. Our joy in service and suffering. This joy seeks the glory of God in Christ and the welfare of others out of love for Christ, not self.

II. THE HUMBLE EXCHANGE IN CHRIST (3.7-9)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 3.7-9.

1. What verse seems to express Paul's goal in life? Why?
2. What things does Paul considered to be loss in view of knowing Christ? Why?
3. What kind of righteousness does Paul want to find?

B. LEARN IT:

"The great exchange in Christ" (3.7) - It was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9.1-19) that Paul came to the realization that all the "things" listed in (vv. 4-6) did not improve his position with God. They actually became hindrances because the more of them that Paul had, the more convinced he was that God would accept him for his works' sake. Each of his fleshly advantages strengthened his false hope of salvation. Furthermore, they were liabilities because he had to unlearn much of what he had previously boasted in (Hendrickson).

This unlearning became to Paul as a "great exchange." Notice the contrast Paul uses here. "Gain to me" verses "loss for Christ." The word "loss" here means "damaged." Paul's own works in comparison to Christ's were like "damaged goods." Paul had exchanged his "gain" as "*loss for the sake of Christ*" (v.7). Meaning this, instead in being known for his own self righteousness, Paul is now known in Christ'. Paul sees his present 'suffering' for Christ's sake as something that is good, because he will be vindicated in 'glory' in the form of the resurrection.

"The great goal in life" (3.8) - This verse becomes Paul's climatic point in the letter. Paul indicates here that there is only one goal in life and that is to "know" Christ Jesus as Lord (v.8). What Paul came to understand in Christ was a greater appreciation of His person and work. The type of knowledge Paul speaks of here can only be obtain by a personal relationship. It is different from academic knowledge, as with information. It is knowledge of the heart in addition to the head (cf. Jn. 17.3; Gal. 4.9; 1 Jn. 2.18, 29; 4.8). To gain this knowledge of Christ, Paul had to let everything else in life go. Comparing his knowledge of Christ, Paul did not regard anything in life worthy of retaining. It was all "rubbish." All he wanted was a fuller and deeper appreciation of his Savior (cf. Ps. 73.25).

“The great merit in Christ” (3.9) - Merit then is not in having a righteousness of our own, but that which is “through faith in Christ.” This “righteousness” comes from God and it is only on the “basis of faith.” Paul is looking to the future and judgement seat of Christ. One day the Lord will evaluate and judge the decisions and choices Paul made in his life. Paul wanted to be found “in Him,” namely, standing in and on the merit of Christ rather than his own. His merit rested on his own “righteousness” as the Mosaic “Law” defined it. The merit of Christ is His “righteousness” that God credits to the believer’s account when a believer places their trust in Him (cf. Rom. 3.20-23). This Righteousness comes to us “through faith” in Christ and it comes to us “on the basis of faith” from God.

C. LIVE IT:

What does exchanging your life for Christ’s sake look like? Does it mean I surrender myself into full time Christian service? Do I live a monastic life? Not necessarily. What it does mean is an abandonment of priorities and agendas you claim as being of greater value to you than your Savior. It’s those things in life that places objects and idols first before Christ. It those things you say you cannot live without. Its your time, talent, resources, or anything as Paul says, I consider “gain.”

What if Job’s disposition of losing everything in life was the same as his wife’s perspective to curse God and die. If you are living a life that boasts about your own accomplishments as if you had something to do with it, you may be setting yourself up for a great fall. What you need is a “great exchange” of priorities. You need a new goal in life that desires to know Christ above all. In exchange, Christ will give you something more valuable than anything you can offer to Him. From the well spring of life that comes from Him alone you will receive a righteousness not of your own, but one that is eternally based on faith in Him alone.

III. THE VALUE IN KNOWING CHRIST (3.10-11)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 3.10-11.

1. How deep does Paul desire to know Christ? What is Paul indicating he is willing to do?
2. What is Paul’s hope in the future in Christ?

B. LEARN IT:

“Knowing Christ outweighs all other values in life” (3.10) - Finally, we come to the value in knowing Christ. For Paul, the coming to “know” Christ outweighs all other values. Why is this? Because in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2.3). They are so vast that even to begin to know him is more important than anything else in all the world (Hawthorne).

Paul mentions several things he wanted to learn in his relationship with Christ. First, “the power of Christ’s resurrection.” Just as Christ rose again from the dead, Paul knew that if

he died, he would experience such a resurrection. Second, Paul wanted to grow in his knowledge of “the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.” Paul saw that suffering for the sake of Christ as only fair since the Savior had suffered so much for him. The Christian who suffers because of their testimony for Christ, can personally relate to Jesus’ when He suffered faithfully obeying the Father’s will. There is a “fellowship” in that kind of suffering (cf. Rom. 6.8); Gal. 2.19-20). A believer who never suffers for the Lord’s sake cannot do that. The third thing Paul wanted to was to be “conformed” to Christ’ death. The final phrase in verse 10 speaks of complete dedication to the will of God, which results in death for Christ’ sake. This can be death to one’s own agenda for life (Rom. 6.4-11), which may lead to physical death (Lk. 9.23). Death can be a grim prospect, but Paul is not being morbid here. He so loved Christ that he wished to share all aspects of His life, to know Him as intimately as he could. Even willing to follow Him into the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23).

“Knowing Christ gives hope with a view to eternity” (3.11) - This verse poses challenges for some scholars. Some suggest that Paul had some doubt about the certainty of his resurrection. But, we know this to be false because elsewhere in his writings, he was very confident that God would resurrect him and all believers (cf. Rom. 8.11, 23; 1 Cor., 6.14; 15.12-57; 1 Thess. 4.13-18; 2 Tim. 2.18). The Bible teaches that God will resurrect all people, believers and unbelievers, who have died. Some to everlasting life with the Lord in glory (Jn. 5.24-25; 11.25-26; Rom. 6.5,8; 1 Cor. 15.20-23), some to eternal judgement unto the lake of fire (Dan. 12.2; Rev. 20.12-13).

So what is Paul indicating here by stating, “in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”? Paul seems to be thinking here of a resurrection from among those who were physically dead. The word “resurrection” is “exanastasin” in the Greek. It points to the resurrection of believers that will result in Christians rising from among the unbelieving dead, those who are dead in their trespasses and sin. Paul was probably speaking of the Rapture (Walvoord). An event when God will snatch Christians out from among the spiritually dead (unbelievers). Paul is probably indicating and possibly expected to live to see the Rapture. He expected that it could happen before he died (1 Thess. 4.16-17). To that, to know Christ gave Paul hope with a view to eternity by which when raised as from the dead, he would be with the Lord forever.

C. LIVE IT:

Viewing death from a far for some is a morbid thought. But, for a true believer, death is the hopeful expectation of eternity with the Lord. Perhaps death is grim for some because they have yet understood what the “power of Christ’s resurrection” means. Perhaps death is morbid because some fail to grasp what it means to “suffer for Christ sake.”

We put so much confidence in our flesh that to die for the sake of Christ is not something some joyfully look forward to. If this is so, then one may need to reconsider their

relationship with Christ. If living for self becomes more important to you than dying in Christ, then one may find that the only resurrection they will experience will be unto judgement, then the lake of fire.

CONCLUSION:

1. Joy is ongoing for the believer who places their trust in Christ and not in the flesh. Joy is not depended on external relationships or things, but on the internal relationship and obedience to Christ.
2. The value of knowing Christ personally is greater than any accomplishment in life. To know Him is to love Him. To love Him is to obey Him. To obey Him is to bring glory to Him.

“Nobody’s Perfect, Yet”

Lesson 8

Philippians 3.12-21

INTRO: Jim Thorpe is remembered as one of the greatest sportsmen of the 20th century. This memory overshadows the obstacles in life Jim faced. He was born into a Native American family in the early 1900’s. Throughout his life he faced racial prejudice and experienced a difficult upbringing. His twin brother died at the age of 9. His mother and father died a few years later and he became an orphan. It was probably then, not a big deal for him when after qualifying and set to compete in the olympics that someone stole his shoes right before his first event. Thorpe simply put on two other shoes that someone had tossed in the trash. They were different sizes. One, he had to wear extra socks on one foot to even them out. He later went on to win two Gold Medals, but that only touch the surface of what he did in those games. He won gold in the pentathlon, won four of five events. Even the event he didn’t win (Javelin), he had never competed before. He didn’t even know he needed a running start to throw the javelin, and in standing in place, he still came in second.

All this to say, despite the obstacles in his life, Jim Thorpe had his eyes fixed on a goal. He pressed on to win the prize. He wasn’t perfect. His shoes were not perfect. The conditions were not perfect. Yet, despite all that, Thorpe with his God given abilities as an athlete pressed on and won two gold medals in some of the greatest sporting events in the world. He pressed on for prize.

OVERVIEW: The “gain” or “advantages” that Paul spoke of earlier in this chapter were not enough to have made him “perfect” (3.12). His salvation was based on justification by faith in Christ alone. He needed God’s Divine grace to save him. Paul tells the believers that he is by no means a complete and perfect Christian. He for ever presses on to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus until He make us perfect in Him.

Paul mentions this perhaps, because there was possibly a reaction against Jewish formalism which resorted to a perverted form of Christian liberty. They viewed their salvation as being free from the moral constraint of the Mosaic Law and natural law (Lightfoot). They had become “anti-law” (antinomians) because they already saw themselves as being spiritually perfect. Paul warns the believers to beware of these, because they are enemies of the cross of Christ. They glory in themselves and set their minds only on earthly things. J.I. Packer states that “antinomianism” is a name for several views, one of which is “Gnosticism.” Gnostics believed their spiritual being was unaffected by the action of their flesh. They regarded carnal sins as being, at worst, forms of bodily disease (Encyclopedia Britannica)

THESIS: Therefore, the goal for believers is to run after the prize of God in Christ, that is our salvation. Lay hold of it, live for it, long for it eagerly, because nobody’s perfect, yet.

I. LAY HOLD OF THE PRIZE IN CHRIST (3.12-14)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 3.12-14

1. What do you suppose was the “it” that Paul had not “obtained”?
2. How did he say he would “lay” hold of “it”?
3. What was the “prize” Paul was reaching for?

B. LEARN IT:

“Paul’s zeal for the prize in Christ” (v.12) - Paul’s zeal is to know Christ more and His resurrection from the dead (vv. 10-11). The apostle did not want his readers to understand that his conversion had brought him into, or that he had “obtained it” yet. At conversion his views about what is important in life changed drastically, however, he did not believe he was by any means “perfect.” The word “perfect” (teleios) has various meanings, one of which is to be “complete” or “mature in mind” as oppose to one who is a beginner or immature. To be perfect “means one who is qualified in a subject as opposed to a mere learner” (Barclay). Therefore, Paul’s zeal is witnessed by his ongoing pursuit of greater personal knowledge of Christ, intimacy with Christ, conformity to Christ, and holiness. This is sanctification which does not come automatically by faith as justification and glorification do. We must pursue it (press on) diligently by following the Lord (vv. 13-15; cf. Gal. 5.16; 2 Pet. 1.5-11). One of the reasons God has saved us is so we might enjoy fellowship with Christ (Jn. 15; 1 Jn. 1.1-3). “To know the incomprehensible greatness of Christ demands a lifetime of arduous inquiry” (Hawthorne). This was Paul’s zeal and pursuit in Christ.

“Paul’s reach for the prize in Christ” (v.13) - Paul viewed his experience similar to a runner’s. A runner does not look back (forgetting what lies behind), but reaches out, going hard for the tape at the finish line. Barclay states that Paul is using a vivid picture of a racer with arms almost clawing the air, with head forward, and with the body bent and angled to the goal. His eyes are so fixed on the goal, he lays it all out so he might receive the prize at the end of the race.

Paul is not saying that he refuse to remember things that happened to him in the past which included failures and successes. Those things are no longer his focus. He chooses not to rest on his heritage (vv. 5-7) or his past advantages (vv. 9-12). He abandoned those pursuits for the goal of Christ. He considered all those past things as “rubbish” in order to “gain Christ” (v.8).

“Paul’s goal for the prize in Christ” (v.14) - Paul has a new goal to motivate him. A new prize to reach towards. A greater reward which can only be found in Christ Jesus the Lord. The word “goal” describes as an object at the end of the course on which the runner fixes his gaze. As stated before, this was for Paul, complete knowledge of Christ. He would receive a “prize” when he reached that goal. He would only reach that goal when he entered the Lord’s presence and saw Him face to face (1 Jn. 3.2-3).

This prize he would receive at the judgement seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5.10) where God has called every believer to salvation so he or she may obtain that prize. However, only those who run the race as Paul did, namely, to gain an ever increasing experiential knowledge of Christ, will obtain it (1 Cor. 9.24). The TNIV translation gives this sense: “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

C. LIVE IT:

What are some practical ways one might “press on” for the prize in Christ?

1. Be certain of your salvation in Christ alone.
2. Seek to know Christ more experientially. This is not done by works, but by abiding in Him and His Word.
3. Do not use your works to achieve a greater or certain salvation, use them to serve others for the glory of God.
4. Do not rest on past achievements or failures, but be focused on the call before you in Christ.
5. Make it your sole goal in life to pursue Christ and holiness that pleases Him, not self.

II. LIVE FOR THE PRIZE OF CHRIST (3.15-16)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 3.15-16; 1 Cor. 2.6;

1. What do you suppose Paul means by “as many as are perfect”? Does he mean those who are “sinless” or those who are “mature”?
2. What standard of living ought mature Christians to live by?

B. LEARN IT:

“Paul’s charge to adopt his attitude” (v.15) - Paul urges those who were mature (perfect) among his readers to recognize that what he had said was true. Meaning, “have this attitude, Christ’s attitude.” As stated before, the word “perfect” means “mature.” It does not mean to be sinless. It compares one who is no longer living on the milk of the word of God, but its meat. Just as a baby who is immature, can only receive milk verses a mature adult who is nourished by meat. Paul also promised that God would enlighten those who thought differently about minor matters if their “attitude” was right.

“Paul’s charge to live up to the standard of faith” (v.16) - Paul concludes this charge by urging his readers to be steadfast in this. To “keep living by that same standard...”. The word for “living” can literally mean to “follow in line.” All Christians are called to maintain a consistent life in harmony with our understanding of God’s truth.

The “same standard” Paul may be referring to here is the standard of faith as oppose to works. This standard opposes the standard of moral progress of the Judaizers that Paul discussed earlier in the chapter (vv. 1-11).

C. LIVE IT:

Henry Ironside once wrote: “An apple in June may be a perfect apple, so far, but it will have much greater completeness, or perfection in that sense, in August or September. And so with the believer.”

Christ expects all of us to grow up to maturity in Him. This is the reason for His “Great Commission” to not only evangelize and make disciples, but also, to “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt. 28.20).

To be “perfect” in Christ in this life is to be “mature” in Christ. Some Christians are still nursing on the milk of God’s Word. Even those who have been believers for decades and years. If your knowledge of Christ is still the same as it was when you first learned of Him, then you are not a mature Christian.

Seek to grow up in Him to maturity so that you may live by the “same standard” of faith that opposes those who stress “works” that accompany salvation. Be like the Psalm 1 man who delights himself in God’s word and who is like a mature tree planted by living waters. Which produces fruit in its season of life.

III. LONG FOR THE PRIZE OF CHRIST (3.17-21)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 3.17-21)

1. What does Paul ask his readers to join him in?
2. What three characteristics does Paul point out concerning the “enemies of the cross”?
3. What should believers eagerly long or wait for?

B. LEARN IT:

“Paul’s call to follow his example” (v.17) - In a transitional statement, Paul now urges his readers to not only adopt the attitude and standard of Christ, but also follow his (Paul’s) “example (2.17-18) and those he earlier used such as Christ (2.5-11), Timothy (2.19-24) and Epaphroditus (2.25-30) to challenge his readers. This example and view was radically different from what the Judaizers taught (vv. 15-17).

“Paul’s warning of enemies of the cross” (vv. 18-19) - The Judaizers, who taught legalism (v.2) were not the only threat to the joy and development of the Philippian believers. Another group (Libertines) had an extreme opposite view what the Judaizers taught. They caused Paul much grief because they were misleading Christians. Much of what they taught was contrary to the spirit of obedience to God that had led Jesus to the cross (cf. v.10).

The group that Paul was pointing out was more likely the “Gnostics.” The core of their belief was “antinomianism.” They were against Mosaic Law and Natural Law. They were common among the believers and non-believers alike. Paul addressed them as “enemies of the cross” and that they were “many” (v.18).

“Gnosticism” was influenced by philosophers such as Plato and was based on two false premises. First, it taught dualism regarding spirit and matter (flesh). Gnostics taught that matter is inherently evil and spirit is good. As a result, Gnostics believed anything done in the body, even the grossest sin, has no meaning because real life exists in the spirit realm only. Therefore, it did not matter what you did in the flesh as a believer because your flesh would not affect your spirit. Thus, this is where “antinomianism” (anti-law) comes in because in this sense, one does not need to abide by either the Mosaic Law or Natural because in the end it does not matter. Second, Gnostics claim to possess an elevated knowledge or “higher truth” known only to a certain few, not from Scripture, but from a mystical higher plane of existence. They saw themselves as a privilege class elevated by their higher and deeper knowledge of God.

Paul points out three characteristics that identify these “enemies of the cross” (cf. vv. 2-3): First, they give free rein to the satisfaction of their sensual “appetites” and do not restrain the flesh (cf. Rom. 16.18; 1 Cor. 6.13; Jude 11). Second, they find satisfaction and take pride in things that they do that should cause them “shame” (cf. Eph. 5.12). Third, they involve themselves almost totally in physical and material (earthly) “things,” things pertaining to the present enjoyment of life, to the exclusion of spiritual matters. In short, their ritualistic observances had taken God’s place in their lives. They have become idolaters. Thus, committing treason against God, therefore, “enemies of the cross” (v.18).

“Paul’s eager citizenship in Christ” (vv.20-21) - Paul points out to his readers that they should not follow the example of those “who set their minds on earthly things” because their “citizenship is in heaven” (v.20). Our heavenly citizenship and destiny are far more important than our brief earthly sojourn (cf. Gal. 4.26; Heb. 11.10).

The Roman citizenship the Philippians enjoyed meant a great deal to them (Acts 16.12,21). It enabled them, though living in Macedonia, to say, “My citizenship is in Rome” (Ironside). All believers need to learn as aliens and sojourners on this earth that our citizenship is in heaven, though we are on the earth. (Heb. 11.13; 1 Pet. 2.11).

Another thought concerning our citizenship in heaven is that our Savior, Jesus Christ, will come to deliver us out of this present evil world, and take us to our home to be with Him above (Jn. 14.1-2). The prospect of the Lord’s imminent return should motivate us to live as “citizens of heaven” even while we are still on earth (1 Jn. 3.2-3).

This is something we all should “eagerly” long for (v.21). When Christ returns for us at the Rapture, He will “transform” (v.21) our present mortal bodies into immortal bodies to be like our Lord’s resurrected body. The “transformation” Paul compares these two bodies as such: The mortal body, which is of “humble state” is lowly, weak, and susceptible to all kinds of influences. The immortal body, the new body, will be glorious, more expressive of our true state as the children of God, and incorruptible. This

transformation will occur whether we are alive or dead when the Lord returns (1 Cor. 15.51-54; 1 Thes. 5.9-10). Our bodies will be transformed because of the same Divine “power” by which God will eventually “subject everything: in the universe “to Himself” (v.21).

C. LIVE IT:

Do you long for heaven? Do you long for the great transformation of this body from its humble state to its glorious one? Do you long to be with Christ, whom all things are subject to Him? Do you seek daily living and preparing your life to meet the Lord? Do you or others identify yourself as a citizen of heaven or of this world?

These are great questions to consider as you evaluate your walk with Christ. As Paul stated in verse 18, many walk, thinking they are true Christians, but they are truly “enemies of the cross” because they are long for the pleasures and things of this world than the glories of Christ and heaven.

Make sure your “appetite” and “goal” is set above on the things in heaven rather than the things here below on earth. Follow the example of Christ, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul. Observe how they walked and follow in their line, their standard because of God’s Word, as you eagerly wait for Christ coming.

“Standing Firm until Christ Returns”

Lesson 9

Philippians 4.1-9

INTRO: Have you ever coached or taught a group of people you were fond of? Those who seemed to catch on to your ideas or instruction? Perhaps it was a team of employees you were proud of and you were able to say, “These belong to me.” The Apostle Paul had a similar relationship with the church in Philippi.

Paul’s fondness for the church in Philippi began when he led Lydia to the Lord, thus the first church in Europe was born (Acts 16.14-15). Some reading this letter were his children in faith. Some he disciplined personally. Some were crucial partners who took risks in the progress of the gospel. Some were contributors to the cause of Christ that aided in the resources in Paul’s ministry. Naturally, Paul shared with the Philippian church a close relationship that was thicker than blood. It was a relationship that was born out of and into the blood of Christ whom they devotedly served. Therefore, Paul’s letter reads more like a letter from a father to his children. A loving letter providing wise counsel and encouragement to live by.

THESIS: As Paul begins to wrap up his letter to the Philippians, he instructs them how to continue to live for Christ until He returns.

In this chapter, Paul tells them that it is imperative that you stand firm in Christ (v.1) to live in harmony with one another in Christ (vv. 2-3), to rejoice in the Lord on all occasions (vv. 4-7), and to develop spiritual discernment by dwelling and practicing the things they learned and were demonstrated by Paul (vv. 8-9).

I. How to Live for Christ until He Returns (Philippians 4.1-9)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Philippians 4.1-9)

1. How does Paul feel about the believers in Philippi? (v.1)
2. List three imperatives “in the Lord” that Paul wrote about. In other words, Paul wanted them to do what “in the Lord”? (vv. 1, 2, 4).
3. What was Paul’s cure for “anxiety”? (v.6) What promise from God would impact their lives? (v.7)
4. What sort of things did Paul ask his readers to “dwell on”? (v.8)
5. What should they do with the things they have “learned” and “received”? (v.9).

B. LEARN IT:

The final chapter of Paul’s letter to the Philippians is one of the greatest concerning how to live as Christians until Christ returns. The reason for these things listed in this chapter is Paul did not want his readers to lose their balance and stumble spiritually because of bad influences. He wanted them to take on the mind of Christ as he himself has done, thus continue on with him in the partnership of the gospel.

“My beloved brethren” (v. 1a) - Paul begins this chapter by expressing once again his warm affection for his readers by calling them his “beloved brethren” who are his “joy and crown” in Christ. Paul’s strong affection for the Philippian Christians is clearly seen in this verse. This is one of the warmest of affection for his readers that we have in Paul’s letters. Four times he calls them “brethren” (1.12; 3.1,17; 4.8), and “beloved” twice (2.12; 4.1), and “beloved brethren” cited here. Paul’s expression to visit the Philippians is expressed in such a way that is not communicated anywhere else in the New Testament. He “longed to see” them. A loving desire to visit with them once more before he is executed or Christ comes again.

“My joy and crown” (v. 1b) - Why was Paul’s affection so warmly connected to the Philippians? They were his source of “joy” and his future “crown” when he would stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He would receive a reward for establishing them in the faith. There are two words for “crown” in the New Testament Greek. Both have two different backgrounds. One is “diadema” which means royal crown. The crown of a king. The other is “stephanos” which means the crown of a victorious athlete at the Greek games. That crown was made up of olive leaves, interwoven with green parsley, and bay leaves. To win that crown was like receiving the gold medal in the modern day games. It would have been the athlete’s ambition to win this prize. It also was a crown that guests received at some joyful and festive banquet. For Paul, there was no greater joy than to bring another soul to Christ. This was his source for rejoicing and the reward he would receive in Christ.

Because of this, Paul gives his “beloved” readers seven things to live by to keep them from stumbling as they wait for Christ’s return.

1. *“Be steadfast in Christ” (v. 1c)* - Paul begins by saying, *“in this way stand firm in the Lord.”* Paul already urged his readers to rejoice in the Lord, warned them about two kinds of false teaching that would limit their joy (3.1-4.1). Paul warned them about the Judaizers and the libertines (Gnostics) who would limit their joy in Christ. They were to “stand fast in the Lord” against these agents of evil that would not only corrupt the church, but steal their joy. Paul uses similar terms in his other prison letters such as Ephesians (6.11,13) and Colossians (2.6-7). The “steadfastness” of the Christian life represents that it is more about taking a “defensive” posture rather than an “offensive” one. To “stand firm in the Lord” means to plant your feet on the solid rock and foundation of Christ and His gospel. To build your walk on any other foundation would mean sinking in the quick sand of life or be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (cf. Matt. 7.24-27; Eph. 4.14). The Christian life that is Christ-centered, is a life that is on a sure and solid foundation (cf. Jn. 15.5). Therefore, Paul first instructs his readers to “stand firm in Lord” and you will not lose your footing in your spiritual journey with Christ.

2. *“Be one in Christ” (vv.2-3)* - “Standing firm” involves *“being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4.3)*. This involves both individuals and the whole congregation. Christian unity thrives when the believer’s walk is centered on Christ. Christ is the great restorer to all relationships in the concentric circles of life. When we “subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph. 5.21) divisions among believers dissolve and unity flourishes. Maintaining unity is not always easy. That’s why Paul told the Ephesians, they must be “diligent to preserve the unity.” The situation Paul brings before the Philippians concerns two women, “Euodia” (Success) and “Syntyche” (Lucky). Paul does not disclose the reason they were not in harmony with each other, Paul only instructs them to be reconciled to one another. He also calls on the church, his “true companion,” to “help these women” by coming along side them and help them resolve their interpersonal conflict (v.3). Unity and reconciliation are important themes in the New Testament. These themes express the regenerating and sanctifying work of God in Christ with the Spirit’s empowerment. Jesus preached, *“Blessed (Happy) are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5.9)*. Being a peacemaker then identifies one as God’s child. Paul was calling on his “true companion” to be a “peacemaker.” Paul also points out that these two women, along with others, including “Clement,” were important to the ongoing cause of the gospel and that these were true believers whose names “are in the book of life” (v.3). There are several books of life mentioned in the Bible. One contains the names of people presently alive (cf. Ex. 32.32-33; Ps. 69.28), and the book containing the names of God’s elect (cf. all believers; Lk. 10.20; Rev. 3.5; 13.8; 17.8; 20.12,15; 21.27) and the names of faithful believers (Phil. 4.3). This declaration by Paul seems to indicate that these three seem to have an honored status among the citizens of heaven.
3. *“Be joyful in Christ” (v.4)* - One of the key factors in standing firm in Christ and living harmoniously with one another is having a joyful disposition in Christ always. James reminds us to be joyful in all circumstances, including when we encounter various trials (Jms. 1.2). Paul has already commanded his readers to “rejoice” (3.1). Paul must have felt that there was a great need for reminding them to have this attitude. There are many reasons why believers get discouraged. The Philippians were possibly discouraged because of Paul’s imprisonment. We know that they were distressed hearing of Epaphroditus’s health situation (2.26,28). They were also being weighed down by the antagonism of unbelievers, the attacks from the legalists and libertines, plus friction among certain members of the church. All these things contribute discouragement. To counter against this, Paul prescribes them to “rejoice in the Lord.” Paul is not saying he never felt sad or for them to be unrealistic about circumstances, even Jesus wept when He arrived at Lazarus’s tomb (Jn. 11.35). Paul wanted them to focus on the blessings they have in Christ and to be grateful for these blessings regardless how sad or distressing life can be. Paul set a good example for them when he was in prison in Philippi by singing hymns to the Lord (Acts 16.25).

4. *“Be gentle in Christ” (v.5)* - Next, we should demonstrate a “gentle spirit” before “all men.” The New Testament word for “gentle” contains the connotations of “yielding, patience, forbearance, mildness” and the like. The Greeks during Paul’s time, used this word to describe someone who was justly fair. For instance, there may be circumstances when a perfectly just law becomes unjust or unfair. One who demonstrates “gentleness” understands when to apply the letter of the law and when to apply mercy. Why is this important to note? Because Paul reminds them of the imminent return of the Lord (v.5b). Life is too short to be weighted down by legalistic living that so often creates division. Pick and choose when to be stern and when to be flexible. Deal with others in love the way the Lord has with you. Remember, God demonstrated His own love, that while you were still a sinner and His enemy, Christ died for you (Rom. 5.8, 10). The Lord has graciously lavished His forbearing kindness on us, shouldn’t we do the same for others. This is what it means to have a “gentle spirit.”
5. *“Be prayerful to Christ” (vv.6-7)* - Standing firm in Christ also includes having a devoted prayer life. It is difficult to stand firm if your feet are not positioned on a solid surface. Many are “anxious” in life because they live in fear. Paul’s advice here is that rather than becoming distraught over a particular situation, we should take it to the Lord in prayer (cf. Matt. 6.25-34). What should we take to the Lord in prayer? Paul says, “everything.” How should we take “everything” to the Lord in prayer? Paul uses several different words for prayer:
- a) Prayer (proseuche): This implies worship. Setting apart a time and place to earnestly meet with the Lord to address concerns that concern His kingdom and His people.
 - b) Supplication (deesis): Refers to requests or petitions for certain benefits.
 - c) Thanksgiving (eucharistia): Describes the grateful disposition of the one praying, acknowledging the past mercies of the Lord, including that the Lord has heard and answered their prayers.
 - d) Request (aitemata): Are the individual requests to God that make up the whole prayer.

“The surpassing peace of God” (v.7) - When believers continually yield themselves to the Lord in prayer, Paul says then, *“the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (v.7)*. When we release our concerns to the Lord, the Lord replaces those concerns with His peace. Christ told His disciples: *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11.28-30)*.

A “yoke” is a wooden crosspiece that is fastened over the necks of two animals and attached to the plow or cart they are to pull. Now, the “yoke” that Jesus was referring to

was the burden of the system of works that the Pharisees laid on the backs of the people. Jesus was offering to relieve those who were weighted down by these burdens so they may find rest in Him alone.

“*will guard your hearts*” (v.7b) - Just as “rejoicing in the Lord” is a safeguard (3.1), so is praying. Paul says that a consistent prayer life will not only bring peace that passes all understanding, it will keep you focused on what is right. It will protect your hearts and minds from worrying about things that really do not matter from the kingdom perspective.

Now, to be clear, this verse does not promise peace as the indicator of God’s will when we are praying about what we should do. The promise of this verse is that if we pray, rather than worry, God will give us peace. Anxiety brings no peace, but praying does.

6. “*Be discerning in Christ*” (v.8) - Paul now comes to the final imperative that explains how to stand firm in Christ. Paul lists five things that deal with what the believer should spend his or her time thinking about. If you are anxious, pray first, then as Paul told the Corinthians, “*we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor. 10.5). Here, Paul expresses the same idea. Your prayers and your thoughts both involve mental concentration. Paul then, lists six virtues that should control the mind of the believer:
- a) “True” (*alethe*) means valid, honest, and reliable (cf. Rom. 3.4).
 - b) “Honorable” or “noble” (*semna*) means worthy of respect (cf. Prov. 8.6; 1 Tim. 3.8, 11; Titus 2.2).
 - c) “Right” (*dikaia*) refers to what is just and upright.
 - d) “Pure” (*hagna*) denotes cleanness and connotes moral purity.
 - e) “Lovely” (*prospfile*) means what is amiable, agreeable, or pleasing.
 - f) “Of good repute” or “admirable” (*euphema*) refers to what is praiseworthy because it measures up to the highest standards.

Paul says that the believers mind should “ *dwell on these things*” because they are “excellent” and “worthy of praise.” What Paul means here is that we are responsible for our own thoughts and we should and can hold them to high and holy ideas. As the writer of Proverbs states: “*For as he thinks within himself, so he is*” (Prov. 23.7).

7. “*Be committed to Christ*” (v.9) - Wholesome conduct (v.9) should follow wholesome thinking (v.8). This takes commitment. Not only should believers be mindful and “dwell” on holy ideas, they should also commit to “practice” them. Paul is asking his readers to put the things they have learned into practice. To follow his example. They all have personally “learned and received” many helpful lessons from Paul. They had personally “heard” his verbal instructions and “seen” his individual example. They just needed to put them into practice. By doing so, the “*peace of God will be with you*” (v.9). What Paul means is that they would experience God’s presence by

enjoying the peace that comes when they walk in fellowship with God. Both the “peace of God” and the “God of peace” will guard the believer who is a committed partner in the work of the gospel.

C. LIVE IT:

What does this look like today for the believer? The wonderful thing about the Word of God is that it is never outdated. It is just as sufficient today as it was during Paul’s time. Thus, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the application Paul had for his original readers, still has application for us today.

For instance:

1. Believers should rejoice in Christ always. Especially when the Lord is using them to bring others to him. Because, the Lord has called them to be partners with Him and other fellow believers in the gospel of Christ. To proclaim it, live it, and to defend it.
2. Believers should be diligent in preserving the unity among believers in Christ. Having a forbearing spirit with all people. The Love of Christ we live out before others will never fail. It not only believes all things, it also endures, it is patient, and perseveres to the end.
3. Believers should always pray about small and difficult things as not to be anxious or to worry. Keep from taking on the burdens you were not meant to carry. Take on Christ’s yoke. Walk freely in Him in the peace that only He can provide. In doing so, He will guard and protect your heart and mind.
4. Believers should always be thinking about wholesome things that are praiseworthy and excellent. Things that honor and glorify the Lord. Things that build up, not tear down.
5. Finally, Believers should be devoted to put into practice all the things that Christ taught His disciples. All the things Paul instructed his readers. To mimic not only the Apostle, but to walk worthily in a manner to the calling by which we have been called to. In other words, be and act like Christ.
6. Walk peacefully with God as His child. Be at peace with the Lord and with others as you wait for Christ’s return or when He calls you home.

“Thankfulness for God’s Provision”

Lesson 10

Philippians 4.10-23

INTRO: When we think of God’s provisions the first thing that comes to mind is a place to live, food to eat, our vocation, and our health. But there is so much more in how God reveals His providence in our lives through Christ. Take for instance a poem from Ruth Gibbs Zwall, entitled, “The Parable of Tomorrow.”

“I looked at the mountain. ‘It is too hard, Lord,’ I said; ‘I cannot climb.’
 “Take My hand,’ He whispered; ‘I will be your strength.’
 I saw the road, ‘It is too long, Lord,’ I said; ‘so rough and long.’
 “Take My love,’ He answered; ‘I will guard your feet.’

I looked at the sky. ‘The sun is gone,’ I said; ‘already the Way grows dark.’
 “Take the lantern of My Word,’ He whispered; ‘that will be light enough.’
 We climbed. The road was narrow and steep, but the way was bright.
 And when the thorns reached out, they found His hand before they touched my own.

And when my path grew rough,
 I knew it was His love that kept my feet from stumbling. Then I grew very tired. ‘I can go no farther, Lord,’ I said.
 He answered, ‘Night is gone. Look up, My child.’ I looked and it was dawn. Green valleys stretched below.
 ‘I can go on alone now,’ I said - and then I saw the marks.
 ‘Lord, Thou art wounded. Thy hands are bleeding. Thy feet are bruised.
 Was it for me?’

He whispered, ‘I did it gladly.’
 Then I fell at His feet. ‘Lord, lead me on,’ I cried.
 ‘No road too long, no valley too deep, if Thou art with me.’
 We walk together now and shall forever!”
 (From Daily Bread, Tuesday June 18).

OVERVIEW: The poem above shares the attitude of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. As Paul communicates to the believers in Philippi from his prison home in Rome, Paul seeks to lighten their burden by shouldering it for them, to encourage them, to give them hope and light their way as they walk together with him as partners for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

As Paul draws his letter to a close, he once more encourages them by commending them on their efforts to share their fellowship of gifts once more with him. In this Paul rejoices in the Lord and reminds them of the personal support they have had on his ministry up til now. Paul also blesses

them with a promise from the Lord that He alone will supply all their needs according to His riches in glory in Christ. For, He is the eternal God of all creation and great Savior of our souls through His unmerited favor through Christ alone bestowed lavishly on all who believe in Him. Therefore, Paul's final words to the Philippians are grateful thoughts on God's provisions presently and in the past through the church in Philippi.

THESIS: Believers need to express gratitude for God's providence in all things for all time. He not only will supply all our needs, He will also enable us to do all things through Christ alone.

I. Present Provisions (4.10-14)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 4.10-14.

1. What was the cause for Paul's rejoicing in verse 10?
2. What has Paul learned in ministry through all his years? (vv.11-12)
3. What enables Paul to continue on?

B. LEARN IT:

Paul begins this section with a thoughtful appreciation for God's provision through the thoughtful Saints in Philippi. Even though he begins this section with the conjunction "but," Paul is not implying a contrast to something he previously stated. He is simply introducing a new idea that expresses his glad appreciation for their expressed loving concern for him by the sending of a gift. Because of this, Paul expresses his joy in the Lord by stating, "*but I rejoice in the Lord greatly...*" (v.10). The ongoing expression of joy by Paul simply demonstrates Paul's disposition no matter the circumstance.

"*Concern Renewed*" (v.10) - Why is Paul rejoicing in the Lord (v.10a)? He is rejoicing because they have "revived" their "concern" for Him. It should be noted that Paul chose to rejoice instead of chiding them for failed attempts to assist him. Their failure seems to have resulted from some unavoidable circumstances ("*but you lacked opportunity*"). Instead of chiding them, Paul commended them for their "revived" efforts and concern.

Notice also that Paul's joy is not on the gift he would have received, but in their "concern." Paul wanted them to know and understand that he would have been perfectly content if he had not received anything. It was simply the thoughtfulness of the Philippians that meant more to Paul. To that he rejoices.

"*Christ's Strength*" (vv. 11-13) - Because of this, Paul makes it clear he was not speaking according "from want." Because of Christ's strength he had "learned" how to be "content in whatever circumstance" he was in. Paul tells them that his previous experiences of living in "prosperity" and "poverty" had taught him how "to get along with humble means." Simply, Paul had "learned" what the "secret" sauce was to "suffering." Not only his previous experience taught him this, but the source of his strength came from Christ Himself for he states, "*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*" (v.13)

Paul's contentment did not come from positive thinking or will power. It came through Christ who enabled him to be content. The independence in whatever circumstance came from his dependence on the Lord. This was because Paul's life was centered on Christ, not material things. One's contentment in Christ alone, stating it another way, one's dependency on Christ alone is the enabling strength and secret to contentment. Paul had explained earlier that the most important thing in life was Christ (2.7-11). When we humble ourselves by denying self, picking up our cross to follow Christ (Luke 9.23), then we can be content no matter the circumstance we find ourselves in, for richer or poorer, hungry or filled, abundance or suffering.

"Commending Contribution" - (v.14) - In view of Paul's attitude, he adds that it was good of them to send a gift to share with him. When they had lost an opportunity, they could have given up and not bothered Paul, but instead, they went ahead and risked the opportunity to bless Paul. Paul commended them for doing so, not wanting to discourage them. Paul wanted them to continue to be cheerful givers by modeling for them how to be a grateful receiver.

C. LIVE IT:

Believers should know that God loves a cheerful giver, but what is also just as vitally important is being a grateful receiver. A grateful receiver makes giving a joyful expression of love and concern. So, as much as we should all excel to be cheerful givers, make sure you commend others in their attempts to be givers. This does not come easy, perhaps, it may even be more difficult to be a receiver than giver. Be gracious to others who want to bless you. Receive it with joy and commend them for doing so. Make giving and receiving a pleasurable act in the church. An act that is gratefully done in Christ alone who gives us strength.

II. Previous Provisions (4.15-20)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 4.15-20.

1. How long has the Philippian church been supporting Paul?
2. What does Paul seek for on the behalf of the Philippian church? (v.17) What do you suppose he means by this?
3. What have they become to the Lord by their example? (v.18)
4. What promise did Paul make for the Philippian believers? (v.19)

B. LEARN IT:

"Thoughtful Generosity" (vv.15-17) - To build on his attitude above and to put away any doubt they may have had about the genuineness of Paul's gratitude, he references their previous gifts. From the very beginning, the Philippians had been generous to Paul, more than that, they were the only church who "shared" with him in the matter of "giving and receiving." When Paul left their town after planting the church in Philippi, he continued on his second missionary journey. He had traveled south from Philippi into the province of Achaia. The gift that Paul was possibly referencing was the one he mentioned in 2

Corinthians 11.8, the gift that reached Paul in Corinth. Even before that Paul mentions the gift they sent “in Thessalonica” (Acts 17.1). Here Paul is reminding them of their history of thoughtful generosity.

However, the most important thing to Paul was not the gifts in themselves. It was the spiritual reward that would come to the Philippians (“the profit which increases to your account”) - because of their financial investment in his ministry. When believers in the church contribute to the work of the church or to the work of missions, you are sharing in the partnership of the progress of the gospel. Whether you are the worker, the sender, the giver, the receiver, all are shared partners through thoughtful generosity.

“Thoughtful Appreciation” (v. 18) - Paul was so appreciative that he felt fully satisfied. The gift he received from them, he received “in full.” This acknowledgement was Paul’s written receipt for their donation as much as a thank you note. He viewed their gift as a sacrificial offering ultimately made to the Lord that was like a “fragrant aroma” received well not only by Paul, but also as a “acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” Monetary means are not the only sacrifices we can make to God, others include our possessions (v.18), our bodies (Rom. 12.1-2), our converts (Rom. 15.16), our praise (Heb. 13.15), and our good works (Heb. 13.16).

“Thoughtful Promise” (v.19) - The promise that Paul makes here is in harmony with previous revelation regarding how God supplies the “needs” of His people (cf. Prov. 11.25; Matt. 5.7; 6.33). This promise is not a name it, claim it promise, nor a faith base promise. Simply, the Lord is always providential when it comes to the needs of His people. It is the needs that God will meet, not the greeds. God will do this “according to the riches in glory in Christ Jesus” not according to our desires and wants. All that God does concerns the riches of His glory. Jesus reminds us that we should not be anxious about things, but to seek the Kingdom of God above all things, and He will supply what you need (cf. Matt. 6.25-34)

“Thoughtful Praise” (v.20) - Paul now concludes the body of his letter with a doxology by which he praised God for His providential care. God’s care comes to us through His Son, and He often uses His people as His channels of blessing. Nevertheless, ultimately God is the Provider of His people’s needs. May we ever be mindful of this truth and be grateful to Him alone!

C. LIVE IT:

Harper Garcia Smyth wrote a hymn in 1903 entitled, “Make Me a Channel of Blessing.” In it she reminds us that we can only give either to God or to others, what He has equipped us to give. The hymn is a reminder that the Lord is the Creator and the Creator of all things. Everything thing that exists comes from His hand. All things were created by Him and for Him (Col. 1.16).

Harper Smyth makes a very clear application that the gifts we have been given is the gospel of peace. Since we have been given this precious treasure from the Creator of all things, should we not be a channel of God's blessing to others? Below are some of the lyrics of this wonderful hymn:

*“Is your life a channel of blessing?
Is the love of God flowing through you?
Are you telling the lost of the Savior?
Are you ready His service to do?”*

(Refrain)

*Make me a channel of blessing today,
Make me a channel of blessing, I pray;
My life possessing, my service blessing,
Make me a channel of blessing today.*

Be a blessing to others through thoughtful generosity and service that pleases the Lord and sacrificially acceptable to Him.

III. Personal Greeting (4.21-23)

A. LOOK IT UP: Read Philippians 4.21-23.

1. Outside of Paul, who else greeted the saints in Philippi?
2. With Philippi's connection as a Roman colony, why is this greeting significant to those in Rome?
3. What does Paul's final greeting and benediction say about how we should feel and speak to one another?

B. LEARN IT:

We now come to Paul's closing greeting and benediction. Paul does this to cement good relations with the Philippians and to point them again, in closing, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

“To the Philippians Saints” (v.21) - First, Paul wished to pass his personal greeting to “every” individual believer whom they would touch. This probably means Christians in the nearby towns, not just in Philippi. This personal greeting also included those currently with Paul as in, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

“From the Roman Saints” (v. 22) - Second, Paul's greeting also includes “those of Caesar's household.” These were probably some of the employees of the imperial government, possibly some from the praetorian guards. Some of which whom had evidently become believers (1.13). Since Philippi as a colony had close ties with Rome, it is likely that some of the Roman Christians had friends in the Philippian church.

“Closing Benediction” (v.23) - This benediction is similar to Paul’s initial greeting (1.2; cf. Philemon 25; Gal. 6.18). Benedictions are more than just nice poetic closures in Christian communications, whether in person or in letter form. It reminds believers of God’s unmerited favor (grace) through the Lord Jesus Christ that was bestowed on them supernaturally (power). This was lavishly given to them collectively in full measure on their spirits (cf. Eph. 1.3; 1 Tim. 1.14).

C. LIVE IT:

Paul’s relationship with the believers in Philippi and for the most part in all the churches ran deep through Christ. Paul’s care and concern for the churches, especially this church is thoughtfully and genuinely expressed.

Oh, that we as Christians would express continuously this deep affection for one another that first was demonstrated in Acts 2.42-47. A common bond that lives symbiotically through Christ as one unified body called His church.

We need to emulate the servanthood of Christ. The attitude of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ. We need to carry each other’s burden and take on the burden and yoke of Christ. We ought to rejoice in the Lord no matter the circumstances so that the progress of the gospel continues until Christ returns. We need to look forward to the coming of Christ as if it could happen at any moment. Being alert, ready in or out of service to Him. We need to be steadfast in the defense of the gospel to protect it’s integrity as God’s completes His “good work” in us. This we can do, because we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us. This we can excel in as we focus on praise worthy things. This we can do together as we partner with one another, whether free or in prison, in the support, the growth, and ongoing witness of the gospel of Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is my prayer that this study will make you aware of Paul’s great burden and to make his attitude our own, so we can all with other believers join together in partnership in the gospel. In this I rejoice that the gospel is continually being promoted and progress is being made all for the glory of the Lord. Amen!