

Joy in Christ Jesus

Messages from the book of Philippians

By

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Intro

This is a series of messages from the book of Philippians. This book known of the book of joy can help you through just about any situation. These messages are my way of sharing what I have received from this wonderful book.

The Start of a New Church

Philippians 1:1-2, Acts 16:11-40

Imagine a cold dark prison. You see a prisoner there chained to the guards. This prisoner is unassuming in appearance and for the moment is very quiet. He is hunched over and completely absorbed in a letter he is writing, he is writing a love letter from his prison cell. This love letter is not to his wife or fiancé, but to a church that he loves dearly.

You see this man in prison is the Apostle Paul. He is writing this letter for the church at Philippi. Paul loved the Philippian church very much. He wanted them to know that he was all right. He also wanted to thank them for their faithful gift they had brought to him while there in prison. Paul was conducting a prison ministry. Not a prison ministry like we normally think of in reaching into the prisons. He was inside prison and preaching there. He used his prison like a pulpit to preach the Gospel to all that came into his path.

Paul is writing a letter to the Philippian church to encourage them. You would think it is the one who is in the prison who would need the encouragement. In This situation Paul is in the prison writing a letter of encouragement to the church that he loves so much.

He is writing a thank you note because the church had supported him all throughout his ministry. A Christian Brother, Epaphroditus had brought a gift to him form the church. This brother who brought the gift had become deathly ill. The church had learned of his sever illness and become discouraged.

Just imagine if we had one of our fine young people in our church take a gift to another country to support a missionary there. Could you then imagine we got word back that he was sick and about to die. We would be concerned, worried and probably discouraged. This is what had happened to the church at Philippi. Paul wrote to encourage them that the one who brought the gift was not going to die. He was going to be all right.

Paul had a great emotional tie to this church in Philippi. You can understand the emotional tie Paul had to them when you consider the background of what happened. Paul had been involved in this church at its very beginning and that made his emotions run deep.

I remember sitting on an evangelism committee in Inverness Scotland and talking about ways to reach the Kinmylies community. One of the suggestions was to begin a new work. From that point things began to develop until the work formed as a new Church. They called their own pastor and made their own decisions. I was excited to be a part of that from the very beginning. It was exciting to be one of the first ones to preach there in a little mission church that was growing and meeting the needs of the people. Being at this church start from the beginning gave me an emotional attachment for the believers there.

In seminary I went to Iowa to begin a new work in church planting. We began by knocking on doors. We talked to people about the Lord Jesus and invited them to be part of a new worship. We watched the group develop as people began to meet for Bible study. We started worship services in the community center. This fellowship began to grow and when we left one of the members took on the leadership. I was involved from the beginning and it gave me an emotional tie there.

That is the kind of powerful emotional bond that Paul writes with. Think how much we rejoice with our own mission church. I received a call Friday from the Mission Church pastor that they had won a family to the Lord and this new family is now coming to their church. We rejoice and there is an emotional tie. Paul loved the church in Philippi. He was expressing his love to them through a letter.

The work had flourished and it had been a great work. Turn to Acts 16:12. Before we launch into a series of messages on the book of Philippians it will be helpful to get the background of what took place in Philippi. It was a new mission start filled with evidence of the hand of God and the Gospel went forth in miraculous ways. The Lord was at work.

Let's consider the Apostle Paul and remember that he was not raised in First Baptist Church Jerusalem. As a matter of fact Paul was known as Saul and he studied Judaism under one of the greatest teachers of all times, Gamaliel. He had learned so much that made him zealous for the Jewish faith. It was this zeal that got him in trouble with the Lord. He was zealous, but his zeal was not grounded in truth.

The Apostle Paul was trying to stamp out Christianity. He was on his way to Damascus when he had his great encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. A light blinded him and he asked, who is that? And the voice came from the Lord Jesus Christ, Saul, Saul why do you persecute me? When he asked who it was the Lord identified himself. It is the Lord Jesus Christ whom you persecute. Here was Saul very religious and very zealous wanting to serve God, but he was having a misguided zeal and actually doing harm for the God he desired to serve.

He was trying to do his service outside Jesus Christ. Paul was a persecutor of Christians. It is noteworthy to consider that when Jesus asked Saul why do you persecute me, Saul had not directly persecuted Jesus. Paul was there and in hearty agreement at the death of Stephen, but he never personally persecuted Jesus Christ. Paul was not involved at the death of Christ. Yet, Jesus spoke these words, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

We need to remember that as believers we are part of the body of Christ. When Paul persecuted Christians, Jesus says, "You persecute me." We are a part of the body of Christ and we need to understand that we are the extension of Christ's ministry. How we live and what we do will make an impact on how others view Jesus Christ.

When Paul returned to visit the new churches after his first missionary journey he had a falling out with Barnabus. This falling out was over taking John Mark back on the journey. So Paul and Barnabus parted ways and Silas joined Paul as they traveled. They were planning to go to Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbade them. At that time Paul had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia crying out for help.

This was a supernatural act that would lead Paul to Philippi. Paul answered this call and sailed to Annapolis and then walked to Philippi. When he got there he did what was his practice. He looked for the synagogue to preach the gospel. Wherever Paul went he was looking for someone to give the message of Jesus Christ.

In Philippi there was no synagogue. He went to the river and preached there at the riverside. He went outside the gates where they met for prayer. Paul met a lady named Lydia who was a seller of purple. She must have been wealthy because this purple was considered very valuable. She had already become a convert to Judaism. Paul preached the message to her and she accepted Christ and her household. It was the beginning of one of the great works recorded in the New Testament.

When we think about the Apostle Paul, we think about the books he has written and the influence of his writing. It has been said that Paul's missionary activity was more influential than his writings. There is a great work that can be done in missions and starting new churches. We too can make a great influence if

we are faithful to share the message of Jesus Christ. Paul always took the opportunities to share Christ. Even as he is writing this in prison.

Paul is chained to guards and sharing about Christ to the guards. These guards would come to know Christ and then share their newfound faith in Jesus with others. Sometimes we jokingly refer to this as the “chain reaction” of the Gospel. Paul is chained to the guards and sharing the gospel with them. We too need to be taking every opportunity we have to share the message of Jesus Christ. Paul has this wonderful encounter in Philippi the people are receptive to the Lord. Not every encounter Paul had in Philippi could be categorized in this way.

Paul was preaching the Gospel day in and day out. He met a slave girl who had a spirit that would tell the fortune of people. This evil spirit of this lady made her say, these men are of God.” Paul cast out the spirit that was in that lady. This fortune telling was bringing money to some of the men. Paul suddenly had a group of people against him. Paul had turned this city upside down and he was not welcome to stay there and preach a gospel message that would cause financial problems in the city.

It is amazing when you get into areas where people practice these kind of evil spirit practices. When I was planning my first ministry trip outside the USA to Brazil I was excited. I was reading about all the good things in Brazil. Then I read that part of the preparation material that said that where I was going was the center for Evil Spirit worship in all South Brazil.

This is the kind of opposition that Paul encountered and it still goes on to this day. As we were sharing Christ with the people those who worshiped the evil spirits stood outside playing percussion instruments. We knew that the spiritual battle was real. We also knew that through Christ we are more than conquerors.

When Paul preaches the gospel he comes against opposition. He comes against physical opposition and he comes against spiritual opposition. Paul is in the kind of area where he faces spiritual opposition. If we are going to live on the cutting edge we need to expect to have opposition. We should also expect to overcome any opposition.

They bring charges against Paul because he has thrown the city of Philippi into an uproar. He is stripped beaten and thrown into prison. Here he is in prison with painful wounds. What could be more discouraging than this? Yet that night Paul and Silas were singing spiritual songs to the Lord and the others in the prison are listening to them.

How often do we let our circumstances get us down? Things don't go right, the way we planned it. We get discouraged because we focus on our circumstances. What an example from Paul. Every circumstance is against him and he is praising, worshipping and singing hymns to God. Here is Paul in the prison singing hymns to God and a great earthquake comes. The chains that held Paul became loose.

The guard comes and sees that the prisoners are about to escape. He takes his sword and prepares to take his own life. Paul says No! None of us has escaped. The guard asks Paul, what must I do to be saved? Paul said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul had an escape from physical prison, but the jailer had an escape from a spiritual prison.

Charles Wesley expressed very poetically just how we escape from a spiritual prison.

Wesley wrote, *Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and natures night, my eye diffused a quickening ray, I awoke the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off, my heart was free and I went forth and followed thee.*

This is a great image of the release from the spiritual prison. When someone is without Christ in his life he is spiritually a prisoner. Just like a prisoner in a cell the one without Christ is in a spiritual cell of

darkness and despair. A prison cell of no knowledge of Christ. When one comes to know Christ there is a light, a flame and he knows then he must go forth and follow Jesus Christ. This jailer in Paul's prison ministry is wondrously converted along with the jailer's whole household were immediately baptized.

The next day there was an order for Paul's release. Paul tells them he is a Roman citizen so they cannot just mistreat him and then release him quietly. After all this happens Paul meets the new believers at Lydia's house and encourages this new church. This is the church that he loves and has affection for. We want to keep this background in mind all throughout our study of Philippians.

Let's look at Philippians 1:1-2, see the greeting Paul gives this church. *Paul and Timothy,*

When we write a letter we normally sign it as the end of the letter. It was the custom then to put the identification at the beginning. That way when someone was reading a letter they would know at the beginning who was writing. Paul puts his name and Timothy. He put Timothy because he was so closely associated with the work of Paul.

And Paul says something very unusual; (Philippians 1:1) "*servants of Christ Jesus.*"

Your version may say slaves or you may have servants. Often Paul would begin his letter as an Apostle of Jesus. But there is no question of his Apostleship in Philippi. He signs this letter as a servant of Christ. Slaves had no rights and no privileges. Paul is saying I belong to the Lord. There is a complete surrender to Jesus. We need to follow the example of Paul and have complete surrender to Jesus. We need to put aside our own selfish ambitions and give ourselves completely and totally to what Christ would have in our lives.

Paul then mentions his readers, *to all the saints in Christ Jesus in Philippi*. Now when you think of saints you may think of a person who did a great work and earned the title saint. The Bible does not speak of saints in this way. If you are a Christian then you are a saint. Those who have put our faith in Christ are saints because we have taken on Jesus Christ. God looks at us with the righteousness of Christ. Paul specifically mentions the officers of the church in Philippi, *overseers and deacons*.

Then Paul uses the term he is famous for, *In Christ Jesus*. There is an abiding in Christ. When we become Christian we put our lives in union with Jesus. We become one with Christ. He is talking about being bonded and one with Jesus Christ.

He mentions two great themes, *grace and peace to you*. Grace is a reminder that we have our whole Christian existence only by the goodness of God. Anything that we have done has not earned us our salvation. It is all because of unmerited favor. Paul reminded them that their whole existence as believers is by grace.

He uses the word peace. Here the idea is not an escape from war. A war is a conflict between men. Paul is talking about the peace of a spiritual relationship between God and man. When sin came into the Garden of Eden fellowship with God was broken.

Each one of us has sinned. The Bible says, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. When Paul is talking about Peace he is talking about reconciliation between God and man. It was God's plan to reconcile man to himself. God's own son Jesus would pay the penalty and die on the cross. When we experience new life in Christ we have that peace that Paul talks about here.

Paul writes a great love letter to these Philippians. He wants them to know that trusting Christ means peace with God. What happened at Philippi changed lives. God still is changing lives of those who trust him. I hope you would not be satisfied until you know for certain you have a relationship with God that brings you this peace.

Joyful Love

Philippians 1:3-11

It wasn't too long ago I was attending a meeting in Scotland. I was in Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland and I was looking for a place to park. I received advice on how to find a good place to park. My friend told me to drive up to the top of the nearby observatory to find the free parking. As I parked I noticed the great view all around the city. I saw the observatory and I also saw another structure there. This other structure looked to me to resemble some ancient Roman ruins. I wondered if it might be a tribute to ancient Rome. Later I asked around, what is this structure on top of the observatory hill?

I found out that it was a building project that was planned and started, but was abandoned before it was finished. Rather than tear it down it was left there as a monument to all the unfinished projects. How many of us start something, but never finish it? It could be a weight loss diet or an exercise program. These are the goals we set and the projects we have that we plan to finish, but they remain unfinished. We have our unfinished projects.

You know, God never leaves a project unfinished. God is faithful to finish what he begins. Paul is in prison and he has this joyful love because he has a confidence in God. He can write in Philippians 1:6, *"Be confident of this that He, who began a good work in you will carry it out until the day of Christ Jesus."* This great truth brought encouragement to Paul and it can bring us confidence.

We will talk about the joyful love that flowed out of the Apostle Paul's heart. We need to remember that when Paul was writing this letter he was in prison, yet he had so much joyful love coming from his life. Remember what happened at Philippi. Paul had a vision and saw a man from Macedonia asking for help. This vision led him to the city of Philippi. Paul usually went to the synagogue to preach. In Philippi there was no synagogue so Paul went to the riverbank where people met for prayer. He began to preach the Gospel at the riverside.

A businesswoman named Lydia received the Gospel and her and her whole household were baptized. There was a slave girl in Philippi that would follow Paul and constantly say, "This man is of God." Paul cast out a fortune telling spirit from this girl. Paul wound up in jail because what he did brought economic loss to the city. Here is Paul, beaten and in jail, but despite all this he, along with Silas were singing hymns, spiritual songs and giving thanks to God.

Here was Paul in prison and in the midst of all this an earthquake came and his chains were loosened. The jailer, thinking the prisoners would escape, was about to kill himself, but Paul stopped him. The jailer cried out, what must I do to be saved. Paul pointed the jailer and his household to Jesus Christ. You see Paul had a great beginning there in Philippi.

Paul is pouring out his heart in this letter to Philippi. We see his joyful love flowing out. He was in difficult circumstances personally, but Paul knew the Lord's work was going forward. The first thing we see about joyful love is that it expresses thanksgiving.

I) Joyful Love Expresses Thanksgiving: Philippians 1:3-6

Paul said in vs. 3 *"I thank my God every time I remember you."* Think back to the last time you celebrated thanksgiving. It is a time of family togetherness, a time to feast on a great turkey dinner. At that time we think of all the ways we can be thankful because of the good things that have happened to us. Paul was thankful here in the midst of difficult circumstances. He wasn't thankful because of family togetherness or because of the good things that happened to him. He was experiencing very bad times, yet he was thankful in every circumstance.

He wrote in I Thessalonians 5:18, *"Give thank in all circumstances."* Paul is living this very idea. In the midst of difficult circumstances, Paul is giving thanks. Paul has been in prison. He is isolated and limited,

but he is not limited in his prayer. Paul is not limited in his thankfulness. Many people are seeking happiness through different pleasures, possessions or through obtaining power. We need to remember that true thanksgiving and true joy comes from God.

That is why Paul could know joy in the midst of these circumstances. We can experience Christian joy in the midst of tears and tragedy. Paul said, Vs. 4 "*I always pray with joy.*" He prayed with joy because of their partnership. He spoke of this partnership in Vs 5. "*A partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.*" Paul attributed his joy to the partnership of the Gospel.

This was a shared ministry with the Philippians. It is not because the Philippian church was without problems. The church was threatened by disunity that was developing; yet they were sharing in the ministry of the Apostle Paul. The Philippian church and Paul had become one in their work of Jesus Christ. They were involved in Paul's ministry and this made them partners.

We find that involvement is one of the key things to have a ministry partnership. What is it like when you talk to someone who really loves their church? They are excited when they talk about their church. Have you noticed that those who have this love are the ones who are deeply involved? The ones who love their church are not the ones who slip in and slip out. They roll up their sleeves and get involved in their church. They love the ministry of the gospel because they have been involved.

Paul and the Philippians have this kind of partnership. They have a partnership that includes involvement. In our fellowship we need to be as inclusive as possible. We need to involve as many as we can in the joy of taking the gospel to a city that needs to hear the message of Christ. I need to challenge each one of you to take initiative in your involvement. Don't wait for someone to come to you and ask you to get involved in our church. You need to take initiative to be involved in the work of this church.

Right now we face a very key time in the life of this church. It is a time for involvement. This is a time for you to get involved. The role of the pastor is not to do all the work of the church. The role of the pastor is to equip people to do the work. That is why I am excited that we are having a meeting for those who will participate in the Discipleship course, Masterlife. Because this is an area of discipleship that will challenge you to be more involved in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In our church there is a need for this kind of effective partnership in the Gospel. The church of Philippi were contributing in tangible ways. They were supporting Paul financially. They were supporting him through prayer and they were involved in what he was doing in the advancement of the gospel. When Paul was experiencing difficulties they shared with Paul in his difficulties. In times of hardship they too were in hardship.

When it is time for the final accounting and Paul receives his reward in heaven the Philippian church too will share in the rewards. The word partnership is *koinania*, the word we use for fellowship. They were bound together in this partnership. If we work together to see the Gospel go out, then when we see positive response to the Gospel, we will have joy together because we have worked together. This is a partnership to see the message of Jesus Christ go out. Paul had this great thanksgiving because of the partnership with the church at Philippi.

Paul spoke with confidence because he knew that when God began a work, He could complete it. We do not have to wonder if God is able to complete what he began. We can have a confidence that when God begins a work he will complete it. If you are a Christian you can have that confidence. If God has done a work in your heart he will carry it out.

Becoming a Christian is not the end. It is only the beginning. Then you start the process of sanctification. We become closer and closer to God through our walk. The Bible speaks about the final day, when Jesus

Christ returns and the Christian is glorified receiving a new body and receiving rewards from the service on this earth. We have this great promise (vs. 6) that God is able to carry out what he began.

II) Joyful Love expresses Christian Concern Vs 7 -8

Paul says vs. 7 *“It is right for me to feel this way.”* Paul had a moral obligation regarding the affection he showed the church in Philippi. They could put chains on Paul, but they could not chain his love. They can't chain his concern, his hope, and his faith. The very chains that held him became a means for the gospel. He states his warm feelings. He says it is right for me to feel this way. They had been through so much together. Paul had been with them at the founding of their church. Paul had shared with them as they supported his ministry. Paul had been praying for them and he thought of them daily with joy. It was right for him to have this loving affection for them.

Are you being faithful to the ministry God has for you? The Philippians were faithful to Paul. God had led them to support the Apostle Paul and to share in the partnership of the ministry. Are you being faithful to the work God has called you to in times of difficulty?

Today we live in an age of choice. If we don't like what we see on the TV, we turn the channel. So many times that kind of attitude is filtered down into the church. People go from here and there. If they don't like something about their church, they move on. Some people would qualify for the title “spiritual gypsies.” They have no church home. They wander and when they see something that seems exciting they go there.

The Apostle Paul is showing Christian concern and there has been a partnership. He is thankful his partners have been faithful. That is what we need now. Those who will remain faithful, even when times are difficult. We need true Christians to stay faithful when there is a cost, when it is difficult.

In Vs. 8 Paul says, *“God can testify how I long for you all.”* He is calling them to pay special attention to the fact that God can be a witness how he affectionately longed for all of them. Paul assures them of his love. Your version of scripture instead of affection of Jesus Christ may even say the bowels of Jesus Christ. Because the word translated is speaking of the bowels, where the seat of emotion comes from. Paul has this very deep emotional love for the believers in Philippi.

We use the symbol of the heart to speak of our deep felt emotions. Paul wanted them to know of his deep Christian concern of their well being. They had a partnership in the Gospel and he had a deep concern and he wanted to express his love.

III) Joyful Love Admonishes yet more Love Vs 9-11

Paul wants the Philippians to know of the love he has for them and he is asking them to abound more and more in their love. Do they have a love? Yes. Did they love people and love Christians? Yes. Paul is saying I want you to abound yet more in your love.

Isn't this the message that Jesus gave us when he said, by this all men will know that you are my disciples by how you love one another? What is the great test of our Christianity? It is how we have love for our fellow brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Paul is encouraging more love in the fellowship.

We give our different reports of the church in worship service attendance and Sunday school attendance and offerings and contacts made. Wouldn't it be something if we had a measurement or a chart that would say this week we were up abounding in love. We have increased by seventy percent in love over last week. What if we could measure love? It would tell us so much, because that is the key. That is what Paul is telling them to abound in, is their Christian love. (Philippians 1:9)

How important it is when people come and visit us, just how much they sense this aspect of abounding love. Maybe we cannot measure love tangibly, but people know when there is a true fellowship of love. We have love? Yes. But as Paul encouraged the Philippians we need to abound still more and more in our Christian love.

What is the great model for Christian love? What do we look to as the greatest example of Christian love? Our model is Jesus Christ himself. He loved each one of you so much that he was willing to be accused falsely. He loved you so much that he was willing to be mocked and spit upon. He was willing to be beaten; he was willing to be humiliated. He was willing to be crucified and take upon the sins of the world, so much that he would cry out, My God My God why have you forsaken me.

Jesus is this great example of Christian love. Paul is telling this to the Philippian church and we need to hear the message today, that if we have love, we need to abound yet in more love. The word that is used indicates that there needs to be layer upon layer of love. It calls us to super abound in love. How wonderful when you meet a Christian who really abounds in that Christian love. What a testimony for someone who can love in this way.

Pastor E. V. Hill was talking about the racial violence in downtown Watts, in the Los Angeles area. He is as a Baptist Preacher and was caught up in that kind of tension. There was another of the black pastors who had already been killed because of their involvement in this racial tension. E V Hill got a threatening phone call and he was told that if he did not cease his involvement in the racial conflict that he would be killed.

They told him that they would put a bomb in his car. The next day when he woke up he noticed his wife was not there. When he looked out into the garage the car was gone. He looked out the window and saw his wife was driving up in the car. When he asked her what she was doing she said, I just wanted to be sure any bomb would not explode on you. He said he never had to question her Christian love. It was that kind of commitment and love that inspires someone to risk their life. Isn't that the Christian model set by Jesus Christ, giving his very life?

Paul is telling Christians they need to abound even more in Christian love. The word that Paul uses for this love is *agape*, the unconditional love. It is used to describe God's kind of love. We need to abound in a love, but not the kind of love that seeks something in return. We need God's kind of love. The kind of love that does not expect anything in return.

That is what Paul is saying for the church to do, to abound in this love. This love had a direction. He said, Vs 9 "*you abound in this love more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.*" So this love has a goal. We are to abound in love as we learn about spiritual insights, as we learn about the things of God. We are to abound in love. Not a kind of false love that the world talks about. But the kind of love that Jesus Christ lived out. That is what Paul is talking about here.

There were signs of disunity in the Philippian church, but when Paul inspired them, he encouraged them to love yet more. This was the kind of love that was going to conquer any possible disunity that would come up in the fellowship. If we are truly abounding in this kind of Christian love then there can be no threat of disunity. This is the kind of love that conquers all. Paul was talking about love with discernment. A love that is willing to stand up for what is right.

If we are living with this kind of joyful love, and thanksgiving is flowing from our life and we can show Christian concern and we have that abounding love then Paul is saying we will be filled with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is the goal of the Christian to be more like Jesus Christ. To be filled with the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is what we can do when we have this kind of thanksgiving. If we can show concern and have abounding love.

In Philippians chapter 1 vs. 11 Paul says, “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.” Remember that Paul was in prison when he was writing this great Philippian love letter. We can, even in difficult circumstances, have a love that abounds.

Just before the message we heard that great hymn, *It Is Well With My Soul*. The man who wrote this hymn, Horatio Spafford was a friend of D. L Moody and lived in the Chicago area. He was going to take his family on a trip to Europe. On the way he was detained and his wife and four daughters went on the trip ahead of.

The boat they were on sank and only his wife survived from his family. Haratio Spafford received a telegram from his wife that said, survived alone. He lost his four daughters and he was in great pain and anguish, yet love could abound. Even in this circumstance he could apply what Paul is speaking of here. He could have a joyful love in the midst of the deepest darkest grief.

He could still express thanksgiving and Christian concern and have abounding love. That is why those words he wrote, it is well with my soul, have such meaning. In the midst of all that grief and all that despair he could write, “it is well, it is well with my soul.” Won’t we take courage from the Apostle Paul that he can abound in love in the midst of his difficult circumstances? He can show thanksgiving, concern and abounding love. Won’t we ask God to give us these characteristics?

Can your difficulties advance the Gospel?

The question before us is, can your difficulties advance the gospel? They threw the Apostle Paul in prison thinking they could stop the advancement of the gospel. According to Paul this only blazed a trail for the preaching of the Gospel.

Philippians 1:12-14

Introduction

The question before us is, can your difficulties advance the gospel? Can you Imagine if you came to church this morning and rather than being greeted at the door and coming in. Instead, you found the doors of the church were barred shut. You came and found military police outside this church and you were told that the authority of the government closed down this church. Their explanation, we no longer want the Baptist church in this city. We do not like the evangelical witness this church is bringing. We do not like you doing visitation and sharing the gospel. We are not happy with the doctrines preached in the church. We do not want Jesus Christ preached.

Could you imagine if you experienced that? What would happen? Probably what would happen is we would return to our homes and begin to call each other by telephone. We would even call those who were not normally involved in this church. By the time the evening service time came there would be throngs of people turning out crying, you cannot stop me from my freedom to worship. I am going on ahead so don't try to stop me. The difficulties would advance the gospel.

People who thought they could shut our doors would have only stirred our boldness. They would have fueled more testimony for Jesus Christ. That kind of situation happened in the first century church with the Apostle Paul. They threw the Apostle Paul in prison thinking they could stop the advancement of the gospel. According to Paul this only blazed a trail for the preaching of the Gospel. Difficulties can advance the gospel!

Isn't it exciting to consider that our personal difficulties are advancing the cause of Christ! There are two kinds of difficulties that can be experienced. One we can call internal difficulties and the other external difficulties. Take the example of a family. An internal difficulty is when a husband and wife are having difficulties or a father and son not getting along. These kinds of internal difficulties will break a family apart. But an external difficulty, loss of a job or a tragedy, will bring the family together. They pull the family together and cause closeness. These external difficulties can strengthen the family.

This same dynamic can take place in a church family as well. When there are internal difficulties, with turmoil and struggling amongst themselves it can ruin a church. When the difficulties come from outside and someone is trying to bear down on the church it can bring us together and unite us. These external difficulties actually advance the cause of the gospel.

D) God used Paul's circumstances to advance the Gospel. Vs 12

In verse 12 Paul tells us that his difficulties advanced the Gospel. He says, *"I want you to know brothers that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel."* Paul uses that phrase, *"I want you to know."* In other words Paul is referring to something that would not normally be self-evident. What you think would happen, exactly the opposite has happened. You would think when the great leader, the Apostle Paul is thrown into prison and can't go out and preach the gospel that it would hinder the cause of Christ.

That is what you think would be true, but actually Paul is saying, it may not be self-evident, but the opposite has happened. Because of my imprisonment the gospel is being proclaimed more. This is ironic, because the people that imprisoned Paul did so because they wanted to hinder the cause of the gospel. This very thing they did to hinder the gospel is causing advancement to the gospel.

Paul says His troubles have served to advance the gospel. The word advance in the Greek is a word that was used as a military term. If those in the military needed to advance their troops they sent someone on ahead. They are sent to blaze a trail, to clear the forest or prepare the mountain. After the preparation the troops could move. Paul is saying his difficulties were like that. They went ahead, they blazed a trail they made the way for the Gospel to be preached. This is what Paul said his difficulties were doing.

Paul had a divine perspective. In other words he was looking at God's plan, not his own circumstances. If he looked to himself in the prison he could have been discouraged and ready to give up completely. He was looking at God's plan and how God was using his circumstance of imprisonment. God was using it mightily for people to go out and be bold and to preach the Gospel.

You see Paul is writing this letter to the Philippian church where Paul had gone and done the church planting work there. He is writing this letter to encourage them. You can imagine what Paul's enemies were probably saying about him in Philippi. They were saying, "Oh you Christians you have this great leader Paul and you thought you were so much when Paul was here. But let me tell you Paul, is through,

he is finished. He is in prison so you might as well give up and abandon the faith because your great leader the Apostle Paul is in prison and in chains.”

Paul is writing the Philippians to say, “take heart.” Not only despite the difficulties, but also through the difficulties there was an advancement of the gospel. Because God is all-powerful he could take those events and shape them to be profitable for his own glory.

Paul says, “*What happened to me.*” He is talking about all the difficulties that had come upon him. Paul had been in prison in Caesarea. Paul had been taken by ship to Rome as a prisoner. On the way there was a great storm. Those in charge of the prisoners were going to kill the prisoners, because of the storm. Paul had a double peril of death on the way.

The ship was wrecked on the island of Malta. He had a poisonous serpent fasten to his arm. All this happened and he was finally taken to the city of Rome and put in prison, waiting there for trial. All these difficulties and Paul could say these served to advance the Gospel. The wicked may plot against God, but God can overrule to make that very plan work to bring himself glory. The obstacle used to hinder the gospel turns out to be the vehicle used to advance the gospel.

Could you imagine in our church if we experienced the kind of difficulty that Paul experienced? Could you imagine that instead of giving a report on the excitement of the progress of our new building we got up here to say the building has been stopped? What if we here a report that there has been a group of pornography dealers and liquor storeowners that have formed a coalition and have stopped our building legally? Could you imagine through all that if we could stand here and say, those wicked plans have proved to advance the gospel? You would hardly believe it if someone were to say something like that could advance the gospel.

But that is the kind of situation that Paul is in, being thrown in prison. Yet God’s overruling circumstances advance the cause of Christ. Paul was warned in Acts 20, the Holy Spirit had told him, that he would experience hardships and imprisonments. You would think Paul’s arrest would hinder the gospel, but it caused the advance of the gospel.

That story of Joseph, where his brothers did wicked things to him is a prime example of difficulties advancing the purposes of God. His brothers were going to kill him, but they sold him into slavery. They told a lie to their father. They did all these evil things to Joseph and the Bible says of these brothers, you thought evil against me, Joseph said, but God meant it for the good. Even when difficult things come upon us, when we are really living for the Lord, God can use these for good. People may mean evil, but God can use these circumstances for the good.

II) Paul’s circumstances were used to bring a great testimony. Vs. 13

As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

Illustration - testimony

Not long after Paul was in prison there was a man, one of the early church fathers, by the name of Pollycarp. He lived his life for the sake and the glory of God. At eighty-six years old the officials called upon him. Even before this he had a vision that he was to be martyred. He could have fled but he said, no, the will of the Lord be done. The officials called this eighty-six year old man, Pollycarp and they said what harm is it if you would just say, “Lord Caesar,” and make a sacrifice to save your own life. Pollycarp’s great response was, “Eighty-six years I have served the Lord and he never once wronged me. How then shall I blaspheme my king who has saved me?”

The men said to Pollycarp, “If you do not do worship Ceasar we will bring out the wild beasts to kill you.” He said, “bring them on.” They said if the beasts do not scare you then we will burn you

at the stake. Polycarp said you threaten me with fire, which burns only for an hour, but soon is extinguished. The fire of future judgment and eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly you are ignorant of. Why do you delay? Do what you do.”

As they burned Polycarp there was a great testimony that went out. It inspired the early Christians. Because when people stand for what they believe in Jesus Christ it produces a testimony that enables all to see that what Jesus claimed is true. How we live and how we react to our difficulties make a big difference in the testimony that we are giving before a lost world.

You need to know that people are watching you and wanting to know how you respond to your difficulties. They want to see how you will act when you yourself have these difficulties. How you react will make the difference to what kind of testimony you give.

Paul’s testimony was crystal clear. Everything was against him in circumstances and yet he could look to God and praise God. Paul said that throughout the whole Roman guard that his testimony was made known. This Roman guard had about nine thousand soldiers that were stationed in Rome to guard the emperor. They would guard Paul in turns. As they guarded him they began to find out that the reason that he was in prison was only because of Jesus Christ. They learned that his only offense was preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified. Paul circumstances where a testimony to thousands of guards and it was causing Christ’s name to be honored. Paul was in prison because he preached Christ. He suffered because of his dedication to Christ. Through his imprisonment it became known that his only crime was dedication to Jesus Christ.

What are your difficulties? How do they tell others about the power of the gospel? If you are passed over at work for a promotion because of the way you stand for your convictions in Christ. Did you know those difficulties can cause a testimony for Jesus to be honored. Did you know even when you experience personal tragedy in your own life that it can bring a testimony in your life that brings glory and honor to Christ?

Paul was more concerned about the advance of the gospel than he was his own personal situation. People will take notice of our testimony if in the difficulties we are able to praise God and see his overruling providence in our circumstances.

This idea that Paul’s difficulties would advance the gospel should have resonated with the Philippian church. When Paul founded the church he and Silas were stripped and beaten and thrown in prison in Philippi. This persecution and experience in the Philippian jail became part of the foundation of the new church in Philippi. In Acts 16:34 we read, *“The jailer was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God-he and his whole family.”*

Paul said God used his circumstances to advance the Gospel. His circumstances were used to bring a great testimony. Paul speaks about these difficulties injecting a new boldness into others.

III) His testimony encouraged others to boldness in Jesus Christ.

In verse 14 Paul says, *Because of my chains most of the brothers speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.* What Paul was suffering in prison was causing others to be bold and causing them to go out and preach Jesus Christ. They were not bold because they were expecting Paul to be released from prison. They were bold in spite of his being in prison. Even though he was in prison they went out to preach with a new intensity and boldness. Their incentive for this new courage was from Paul’s own boldness the way he faced imprisonment and the way he faced his suffering. Paul’s writing to tell those Christians in Philippi, don’t be discouraged about my imprisonment, as a matter of fact, here in Rome where I am it is causing a great boldness.

People are going out into the street and telling others. So you yourselves can take courage from this to be bold in your relationship with Jesus Christ. This new boldness in Rome would be good news for the Philippians as they were facing discouragement to know that Christ was being preached with boldness. When people go against us because of our stance for Jesus it should promote boldness and courage for us to preach the word of God fearlessly.

Illustration - trails

When the blacksmith strikes his hammer repeatedly on the anvil it is said that the same anvil will wear out many hammers. Those who strike Christians are creating boldness in the body of Christ. When Christians are persecuted there is more courage. This happened with Paul's difficulties. This inspired the Christians in Rome.

In II Tim 1:7 it says, *God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of boldness.* As Christians we are to stand bold and courageous for Jesus Christ. That is what our calling is as Christians. If we find ourselves in a difficult situation where it is hard to stand for Jesus Christ that is the very occasion that God calls us to make our stand for Christ. It is difficult, any age bracket, any economic position, any strata of life it is going to be in difficulties at times. This is when we must stand up for what Jesus has called us to do. We are told to preach Christ with a boldness. Our difficulties can encourage others to preach with a new boldness.

Personally we may find it difficult. We may be going through things that we never thought we could endure. But, if we can hold that divine perspective as Paul did we will see how our difficulties can advance the gospel. Our difficulties can cause a testimony to be made for Jesus Christ. Our difficulties can inspire boldness.

Illustration - persecution

There was a rowboat race. The straggler was clearly going to lose the race. As the spectators watched from the bridge, he looked down upon the one loosing. He wanted him to lose. This spectator spit off the bridge on to the rowboat that was behind. He called the rower a looser and yelled obscenities at him. He made fun of him for loosing. This spurred the rower to a new strength to win the race. Because of this persecution to the rower he became bolder and stronger in the race. Paul is saying the persecution he has faced has made the Christians bold and stronger.

If you are experiencing difficulties for the cause of Christ, if your stand for Christ brings you hardship then take courage. Your difficulties are causing advance for the Gospel. Others will be encouraged to preach Jesus Christ with more boldness than ever before.

Conclusion

Your difficulties will advance the gospel if you are really truly living for Jesus Christ. When you are one hundred percent sold out to Christ then your difficulties will cause advancement in the gospel. That is why the apostle Paul saw his difficulties advance the gospel. He saw his difficulties advance the gospel because he was making such a stand for God.

If you live fifty-percent for Christ, then your difficulties will be only that, difficulties. They are not going to advance the gospel. They are not going to bring out a testimony and inspire the rest of us to boldness. They will just remain difficulties. If you're without Christ then your difficulties will remain just that, only difficulties. When you put your faith and trust in Christ and walk in the ways of the Lord, then your difficulties will bring testimony to God. Your difficulties will advance the gospel.

Motives: The Problem in the Church.

Motives: The Problem in the Church, Philippians 1:15-18

Many people say the biggest problem we face in the church today is an integrity crisis. It may surprise a lot of us that envy and rivalry and dissensions dates all the way back to the first century church. People preached because they wanted to exalt themselves rather than lift up Christ.

Illustration: Motives

In the fifteen hundreds there was a protestant reformer in England by the name of Hugh Latimer. He was known as a great preacher of his day and he had many opportunities to preach. One of his opportunities was to preach before the King Henry VIII of England.

He thought about his great responsibility to bring a message before the King. He also thought that the message that God laid on his heart was not the message that the King was going to want to hear. As he contemplated this, he said that he heard a voice, Latimer, remember you are preaching before King Henry VIII who, if he wills, can take away your life.

Then as he began to contemplate this, he heard another voice, Latimer, remember you are preaching before the King of Kings, do not displease him. Latimer had a struggle with motives. Would he preach what man wanted to hear or would he preach what Christ would have him preach. Latimer chose to

preach what Christ would have him to preach. Ultimately it cost Latimer his life. Paul calls our attention to the area of motives. In our church there are things we seek to do as a people of God. We seek to spend time in God's Word and to pray corporately and individually.

We seek to meet the needs of people and give our offerings. We seek to take the message of Jesus Christ out. There are a number of things we seek to do in our service to Jesus Christ. But as we do these things there is something very startling we need to keep in mind. We could be doing all these things, but if our motives are wrong it will not bring glory to Jesus Christ.

Paul is writing the Philippians and telling them that there in Rome where he is in prison people are preaching the gospel with two motives. There are two camps. There are those that preach the gospel with false motives and those who preach the gospel with pure motives. Paul spoke about this during his imprisonment. During his imprisonment the Gospel was advancing.

There were people giving a clear testimony of Jesus Christ and it was causing a great boldness for Jesus Christ. That was not the whole story. While Paul was there in prison and there was this great boldness in preaching Christ there were two different factions, those with pure motives and those with false motives. For Paul, personally things were not going well. He was held in prison, waiting for a trial. But he could rejoice because the Gospel was going forth.

First we look at those with false motives. How did Paul know there were those preaching with false motives? Were there two groups out preaching the gospel, one group that wore white hats and another wore black hats, those with pure motives and those with false motives?

Motives are something you don't see with your eyes. We do not always know what the motives of people are. But Paul said there were those who preached the gospel out of envy and rivalry. He goes on to say they are preaching out of selfish ambition. Their aim was to stir up trouble for the Apostle Paul.

Now this is one of the most ironic things we could ever picture. Here are people out preaching the message of Jesus Christ. They are preaching the gospel of peace, preaching the gospel of love. They are preaching this great gospel of peace and love and their motive is envy and rivalry. Can you imagine out of envy and rivalry they are preaching a message of peace and love?

That is what has happened. Paul said, Vs. 15, there were those who preached the message of Jesus Christ, "*out of envy and rivalry.*" It seems, as Paul was in prison in Rome that there was a group of preachers that were well known in that area. They had been preaching the gospel and they had a following of people who looked up to them.

Then, along comes Paul on the scene when he is put in prison there in Rome. All of a sudden people are not so interested in these preachers anymore. People are talking more about the Apostle Paul in Rome. Some of these preachers now have envy and jealousy toward Paul.

It seems that these preachers were giving a doctrinally correct message. Their one problem was their motives. They preached with false motives. In their preaching they probably preached against Paul saying he is in prison so you do not need to listen to him. They tried to lift themselves up while putting Paul down. It may surprise a lot of us that envy and rivalry and dissensions dates all the way back to the first century church. Believers there were preaching from wrong motives.

As we look around and we see people today who preach with false motives we need to remember that this is not a new phenomenon. This did not just spring up in our day, but even back in the time of the Apostle Paul people were preaching the message of Jesus Christ from false motives. They were preaching because of self-centeredness. They were preaching because they wanted to exalt themselves at the expense of lifting up Christ.

People always seem to put their needs first. They put themselves in the center of attention. They are like the person who goes to a wedding and seeks the attention that belongs to the bride. Wherever they go and whatever they do they want the attention.

Illustration: selfish pride

One man knew his friends were tempted to selfish pride and false motives. Those who always put themselves in the center of things. This man was in a Christian college where the publishers would send him books. Many of these books he had no time to read.

He would take a textbook and would send it to one of his friends. He would forge a note from the author of the book and say, "Dear friend, I hope that you will be pleased to accept a complimentary copy of my book. I also hope that you are pleased that we make mention of you in this book."

When his friends received the book they would look in the index for their name. Finally they were entrapped to read the whole book in search of the reference made to their own name. Our motives can get us in trouble. All of us battle with false motives. We all seek to lift ourselves up. But we need to remember that we are preaching the gospel of peace, the gospel of love. We need to in no way preach the gospel of peace from envy or rivalry. It was happening in Paul's day.

Paul was accusing some of the preachers of working just to lift up their own faction and their own cause. How much damage has this kind of preaching for self-interest caused? We need to put away all our selfish ambitions and forget about rivalries. At our church we need to work together in harmony and love and preach the message of Jesus Christ out of good will. We need to avoid the ironic tragedy when we are preaching the gospel of peace and love from envy and rivalry.

We need to be concerned about our motives. Paul uses these words envy and rivalry. These are words that are found elsewhere in Paul's lists of sins that we must avoid. Paul said these preachers are preaching the true message of Christ out of sin. It means they are preaching Christ in the flesh, in their own strength. They are putting themselves at the forefront and preaching out of false motives, with envy and rivalry. We need to preach Christ without false motives.

We need to look at the other side of the coin. There were those preaching Christ from pure motives. Instead of those preaching Christ from envy and rivalry Paul said there were those who preached Christ out of goodwill and out of love. These preachers were not opposing Paul. They were preaching from the same Spirit of Christ, that Paul was. Thank God, there were not just those preaching from false motives, but there were those who preached Christ out of good will and love. We see there are two ways that we can proclaim the message of Christ.

Let's pray and hope the way we chose, is the way of pure motives. This is a direct contrast to those who preach with false motives. Paul is using contrasting words of envy and rivalry versus goodwill and love. Those who preach in goodwill and love support Paul. They are interested in seeing his work go forward. They are not interested putting him down or seeing his work being put to shame to benefit their own purposes. They want to preach Christ to glorify God.

They want to encourage Paul. They knew that Paul was put in prison because he was a defender of the gospel of Christ. The only crime that Paul ever committed to be put in prison was preaching the message of Jesus Christ. So they were willing to stand behind Paul even when he is in prison. Others may have been trying to falsely accuse him they out of their goodwill and love were ready to stand with Paul. The cry of the church today is for those who will preach the gospel with pure motives.

Many people say the biggest problem we face in the church today is an integrity crisis. The thing we need most is not doers, but those who do their work with pure motives. There are so many people who do the

work of the church, but their whole motivation is self-interest. You hear of people who join a church just looking to gain business contacts or to keep a prestigious standing in the community. Or they want to be seen and perceived as someone who is spiritual or righteous.

So they join the church for their image, for themselves. They have false motives. Paul's challenge is for us today to check our motives regarding the work we do for the church. Have you asked yourself with what motive that your service comes from. Paul makes it clear our motives are of utmost importance.

Paul himself went to great lengths to make sure people knew he preached from pure motives. In I Thessalonians 2:3-4 Paul said, "*The appeal we make is not from impure motives,*" he said, "*we are not trying to please men, but God.*" Paul is saying what he did was from pure motives. Paul preached from goodwill, out of love. He was not out to lift himself up. He could have done so. He could have tried to rally people behind him to lift himself up.

Paul preached out of goodwill and love to lift up the name of Jesus Christ. How are your motives this morning? The text I Corinthians 4:5 can challenge us in the area of motives. It says, "*When Jesus comes again he will expose the motives of our hearts.*" If we are doing the work of Christ with false motives we may think we can get away with it. We may think we can do the work of Christ with false motives, but we need to remember we are not fooling Jesus Christ.

When he comes again our motives will be exposed. If you are serving Christ with false motives it will be completely exposed. Only those serving with a pure heart will be able to hear those great words, we long to hear from Jesus, "Well done my good and faithful servant." Aren't those the words that you long to hear? Then you need to be sure that you are serving God from pure motives. We need to be sure that we are not seeking the praise for ourselves, but we are out to honor Jesus Christ.

Illustration: unselfish

All through the years the temptation has been there he seek to exalt self more than lift up the name of Christ. When F. B. Meyer was a preacher, he was in his study and could look out his study window. There were throngs of people on the way to church that Sunday morning. What F. B. Meyer found out as a contemporary of Charles Spurgeon was that the people he saw from his study window were not on the way to his church, but to that of Spurgeon. So F. B. Meyer prayed in his study, Lord let there be a blessing in the church of Charles Spurgeon. That is why F. B. Meyer could write books about living the selfless Christ Life. He was ready to serve, and he put his self interests aside and became interested on Christ being lifted up.

We need to not be so concerned with ourselves as that the message of Christ is going forward. We need to turn from all selfish motives. Do you have any false motives? Anything impure in your life? What is needed is to make Christ central.

Paul spoke of the two groups, those with false motives and those with pure motives. Paul said the most important thing is that Christ is central. In vs. 18 we Paul wrote, "*But what does it matter?*" He is speaking of impure motives versus pure motives. "*The important thing is that from every way, from false motives or from true Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.*"

In the church we often use the expression, "Let's keep the main thing the main thing." In other words our main task in the church is to uplift Jesus Christ. To let him be central and take his message out to others that they may know and experience God's love for them that they may know a personal experience with God through Jesus Christ.

This is the main thing and we say, "Let's keep that the main thing in our church." There are so many other things we do and all are good and worthwhile, but we must be sure in our church that we keep Jesus

Christ central. Let's be sure people have the opportunity to hear that Christ loved them so much that he was willing to die for them. Christ was willing to give up his life for them. That is what Paul says is central. That Christ is preached. That Christ be honored is the central thing.

Paul says whether it is false motives or pure, the important thing is that Christ is preached. That is what we need never to lose sight of. Paul is not giving insignificance to those who preach with false motives, but he is saying that compared to Jesus being preached the motives behind it are a secondary factor. Paul knows that the power of the gospel can reach the lost even if someone is preaching with false motives. Those who preached with false motives did not succeed in their goal of disturbing Paul.

Paul rejoiced even though they preached with false motives. Paul looked beyond the negative and the things done to hurt him. He looked to the ultimate glory of God. The ultimate glory of God is that Jesus Christ is preached and people were coming to know Christ. Here is the comment that John Calvin gave about Paul's attitude about those who preach the false gospel he said, "Paul rejoiced in the increase of the gospel. He may not have personally endorsed them. But the main thing was that Paul rejoiced that the gospel was proclaimed and that there was an increase in the preaching of the gospel."

The main thing that we need to have as the driving force of our life is to keep Jesus Christ central. We need to remember that when Jesus Christ returns all our motives will be exposed. So anyone who thinks they can get by with false motives needs to check their heart again. Are you serving God with pure motives?

How to keep an eternal perspective

Wouldn't it be wonderful to go through life day by day with an eternal perspective? Have you ever known that kind of person? Their car breaks down and somehow the service man comes to know Christ. Or they have a health problem and the whole medical staff is witnessed to. Why? They live with an eternal perspective.

Read: Philippians 1:18-26

Think of a modern example of a person who keeps an eternal perspective. The person who comes to my mind is Jim Elliott. He was famous for saying, he is no fool to give up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." This flows from the heart of a man who had an eternal perspective. It is from someone more concerned about the things of heaven than entangled with the things of earth.

In his diary he said, "God I pray to you, light these idol sticks of my life, that I may burn for you. Consume my life God, for it is yours." And then he said, "I seek not a long life but a full life, like that of Jesus Christ." His prayer was answered. His life was not that long. He died taking the Gospel to the Auka Indians.

His prayer was answered in that his life was full. The very fact that he died taking the Gospel to the Auka was a stepping-stone for that tribe to come to know Christ. His life was full because he has inspired many to live with an eternal perspective. His life was like Christ. Not a long life, but a full life. He lived with an eternal perspective.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to go through life day by day with an eternal perspective? When something happens to you and it is used for the glory of God. Have you ever known that kind of person? Their car breaks down and somehow the service man comes to know Christ. Or they have a health problem and the whole medical staff is witnessed to. Why? It is because for them everything in their life seems to have a purpose in God. They seem to be a person of destiny. They live with an eternal perspective.

Paul in these verses gives us some clues on how to have an eternal perspective. How you can go about in your life keeping Christ first. In verses 18-20 Paul speaks about his rejoicing. Remember that Paul is in prison when he is writing these words and he says he is rejoicing. Why is the Apostle Paul rejoicing? Is it because he is about to be released from prison and there is a lot of good news that is just around the corner? Paul does not know if he will be released or tried and falsely accused or even put to death. But yet Paul could rejoice.

Paul could rejoice because Christ was first in his life. His priority was on Jesus Christ. It is not a foolish optimism, like so many express today. Not like the guy who fell off a twenty-story building and at the tenth floor was heard to say, "so far so good." It is not that kind of foolish optimism. His optimism is based on Jesus Christ. Paul said, "I can rejoice," because he knew his hope was in God. Paul's attitude was right, not because of the circumstances, but because his focus was on Jesus Christ.

I) Paul had an eternal perspective through prayer. Vs 19

The first thing Paul does is ask for prayer. He asked the Philippians Christians to pray for him. He is the great Apostle. You would think if anyone could get by without prayer it might be the apostle Paul. But he is the one who asks to be prayed for. Paul was the one who needed prayer. He knew there was nothing he could accomplish on his own, but only through the prayers of his brothers and sisters in Christ would Paul live a victorious life.

You must admit that without prayer you can do nothing. Each one of us is dependent on prayer. When we tell someone we are going to pray for them it needs to be more than mere words. We need to commit ourselves to pray for others when we say that we will pray for them. We need others to pray for us. We need to be willing to ask others to pray for us.

It was a blessing that Sunday night when so many people committed to pray for me as pastor. Almost everyone present came down one by one and made a commitment. I will pray for you pastor every day. That was the very thing that Paul was asking for. He is asking the Philippians for prayer and that is what is so needful and so vital for us. We need to be praying for each other. You need to be praying for the pastor and I need to be in prayer for you. Since that day when you came forward to pray for me I also made a commitment to pray daily for you. I now pray over the roster using the list of members and participants so I too can share in the prayer ministry.

Sunday school teachers need to be praying for those in their Sunday school. Those who are in Sunday school class need to be praying for their teachers. We need to pray for one another. That is the key that Paul talks about in having a right attitude.

Maurice Graham was in the Kuwait Embassy in the time of the Iraqi invasion during that great crises. He talked later about the great things that happened. He talked about the miracles that happened during that time. The miracles that brought him through corresponded to the emphasis on prayer. A prayer emphasis for him was lifted up throughout the whole Southern Baptist denomination. That very time he saw a miraculous intervention to get him through alive. The other day is when his wife was on the prayer calendar for her birthday and again there was a convention wide emphasis to pray for that family. Again something miraculous happened to bring them through. It is the prayers of God's people that mean so much.

I remember when I was serving as a missionary journeyman in Scotland and I came to that time when my name was on the prayer calendar. I went to my pastor there where I was serving and I said, can you imagine this? My name is on the prayer calendar today in 36,000 churches and 14 million members and they are all focusing their attention to pray for me. I asked him to imagine the blessing this day will be for me. He used his Scottish sarcasm to warn me, you may be blessed or you may fall under conviction today. One way or the other we need to commit ourselves to prayer. We need to be praying for one another. Paul then brings forth another way that gives him that right attitude.

II) Paul had an eternal perspective through the help of the Holy Spirit. Vs 19

Here is the great man Paul who had done so much but he was not willing to attempt to accomplish anything in the flesh. He sought to live only by the power of the Holy Spirit. If we are going to live in the power of the Holy Spirit it means completely in submission to Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can willingly allow in our life that we know is displeasing to Christ. We need to surrender it all to Jesus Christ. When you came to know Christ as your savior you surrendered your life before him. If you are going to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, you need to surrender your life day by day, moment by moment. Asked to be filled, and walk in the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit.

That is the key to the Christian life. Not going on in our own flesh or our own power. It is a supernatural life. It is a life of power in the Holy Spirit. Paul knew that even with all his great learning and all his great skills as a missionary that he needed the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says these things will work out for his deliverance. The word Paul used for deliverance is literally the word for salvation. We think about salvation as the time we came to know and trust Jesus Christ. The Bible speaks not only of this kind of salvation when we trust Christ, but also a salvation yet in the future. A time when we meet Jesus Christ. Paul says these things for him will work out at that time of great glorification. The time when Paul is able to meet Jesus Christ face to face. He can rejoice how the circumstances work for his own deliverance. His attitude through prayer and through the power of the Holy Spirit is a right attitude. It is an attitude focused on Christ. An attitude that gives him an eternal perspective.

III) Paul had an eternal perspective because he was heavenly minded. Vs 22-23

Paul thought of the things of heaven. He was willing to look heavenward and that is where his thoughts were focused. In Shakespeare's famous play Hamlet, we find the famous words, "to be or not to be, that is the question." We discover a man who wants to end his life. He no longer wants to go on living, but facing death would be even more tragic.

This is in contrast to what Paul is saying. Paul had a struggle. He says departing or staying. Paul looks at death as parting. He is talking about the onward look to heaven. Paul constantly has heaven in mind. His joy comes from Christ. His life is wholly wrapped up in his relationship with Christ. For Paul heaven means a closer relationship with Christ. He can look at it as a gain because his life means Christ and heaven means a time closer to Christ. It is part of his eternal perspective. He knows his destiny is not in his own hands.

If the choice were left up to him he would rather depart and be with Christ. For him that would be gain. Paul was not thinking of dying, but what lies ahead. That deeper experience of what he already knew. He would know Christ more.

Can you imagine how close Paul was to Christ? He was able to think of death as being with Christ. Compare that to how we often think of death. When I am faced with death I rush to the Psalms. I say like King David, I want to see my children's children. Deliver me from the hands of death. Or like King Hezekiah when faced with death asked for fifteen more years. I say give me life and I ask for more years

on this earth. But not the Apostle Paul. He was so caught up and his life so bound together with Jesus Christ that he could look at departing as gain. He saw it as a closer relationship with Christ.

For Paul it meant entrance into heaven and knowing a nearer presence with God. Paul is hard pressed between the two, to depart and be with Christ or to stay with earthly service. For Paul life was Christ!

For the businessman life is accumulating wealth. For the academic life is accumulating knowledge. For the politician life may be seeking power. For the actor life is to see their name in lights. For Paul life was Christ. Everything he was, everything he did was Christ. That was his whole consuming passion. His whole life was wrapped around Christ. When Paul used the word depart to be with Christ he was using a metaphor. It was like a ship that departed from the dock. The ship loosened the ties and set out for the high seas. Paul looked at death as departing from this earth and going out to the deeper things of Jesus Christ.

Remember, Christian that this world is not your home. We are only visiting here and we are only truly home when we are in the presence of Jesus Christ. Why is it that so many of us lack this ability of the Apostle Paul to look heavenward? We need to have this heavenly outlook and look forward to Christ and looking at death as the nearer presence of God?

So often it is because we become entangled in this world. We put our hands to the plow only to look back. Only to begin a service of God and then we do not finish it through with full commitment. We get entangled in the world and believe the lies of what the world has to offer.

When someone is in the desert and they feel the heat of the sand rising up through their shoes and they are dying of thirst. That is when they see an oasis. A pond of fresh water surrounded by trees where they can get a cool drink. The problem is it is a mirage and they come up with a handful of sand. So often we see the mirage of this world and we believe possessions will bring fulfillment and we get entangled in this world.

The only thing that will truly satisfy is the living water. Only Christ will satisfy. That is why we need to be looking heavenward at all times. Paul had the right attitude. Paul looked heavenward, but that was not it. He did not leave it there. Paul was committing himself to earthly service.

IV) Paul had an eternal perspective so he had committed himself to earthly service. Vs. 24-26

Paul was committed to service while he was here on this earth. You may have heard the expression that someone is so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good. In other words all they do is think about heaven. They sing songs about heaven ready to go to glory and yet, they never seem to do any earthly service. They never seem to make their life count here on earth.

Paul did not have this problem. He had a heavenly mindset and committed himself to earthly service. Paul knew that he would be spending eternity in heaven. But his days on earth were numbered. He needed to make each day count. We only have a short time to work here on earth and we need to make our life count for Jesus.

The Bible says the night comes when no man can work. We know that in the whole scheme of things our life is but a brief span. We need to commit ourselves to make the most of every moment we have. We need to make our life count for service here on earth. That is how we will have an eternal perspective. That is how we will know fullness and joy in our Christian life when we make our life count by serving God here on earth.

It is a call for commitment and a call to involvement. Paul's purpose in remaining here on earth was to give service. He said that remaining here on earth would mean fruitful labor for him. He would be visiting his Philippians friends again and encouraging them in the ways of Christ. There is more to Christianity than just anticipating the great glory of heaven. There is a lost world around us. So many just outside the doors of this church need Jesus. There is work to be done and Paul shows us by example the path to service.

It is part of eternal perspective to have a great service here on earth. There is a call out for Christians to get their hands dirty. Paul is talking about this kind of commitment to earthly service. Paul uses the word remain. This word remain means to be called alongside and to be a helper. So for him to remain on earth meant he was going to be a servant.

How is your service here on earth? Is your life committed to service to others and to Jesus? Did you know that having an eternal perspective is related to your service? It makes a difference how you live your life here on earth. You need to get involved in service, and to the local church.

Do you want an eternal perspective? Get involved. Begin with earthly service. The time is short and the days are limited. Only one life will soon be past, only what is done for Christ will last. Won't you make your life count for Christ? Let's live with an eternal perspective and use every moment we have for service of Jesus Christ.

Prescription for Church Unity

Philippians 1:27-30

Introduction: Disunity

You may notice that during this time of the year that many of our men around the country are glued to the football games on television. College football is such a great part of American tradition. It all builds up to the bowl games at the end. That is what people are waiting for, to win the big bowl game. There may not be another bowl game more prestigious than the Rose Bowl. College players will dream of making it to the Rose Bowl to play under this great college football tradition.

One man who actually lived out that college dream was named Roy Regal. He made it to the Rose Bowl and was able to play in this great game. He did more than just play. He got his hands on the football and he ran. He ran all the way down the field almost the full one hundred yards, making it almost all the way across the goal line before he was finally tackled.

He lived out the dream. Yet this dream was not the dream he thought it was. There were two problems with the run that Roy Regal made. One is he was going the wrong direction and secondly he was tackled by his own player.

This is a picture of disunity. The team normally goes one way together across the goal line. Can you imagine if in a church there is this kind of disunity? A church where someone is running in the wrong direction and being tackled by their own teammate. Church unity is so important.

It seems like there is a real danger for the church in that, the stronger a person holds to their beliefs, and the more their beliefs are important to them, the greater the chance of disunity. People hold strong to their beliefs seem to collide.

There is such need for us, with our great beliefs that we hold dear, to talk about church unity. If someone does not care about their beliefs they don't clash over beliefs. When we hold our values dear it is important that we think of them in terms of church unity. In Philippi they struggled with this problem of disunity. We find insight into this disunity in Philippians 4:3 Paul's focuses in on this problem of disunity.

In Philippians 1: 27-30 Paul brings us a prescription for church unity. In our church we have a theme of unity. In our building program we say, together we build. Together speaks of unity. We say in our building program, united we stand. That word united represents church unity. Unity is important and we now more than ever need to consider what the Bible says to us about church unity.

Illustration: Uniformity

One thing church unity does not mean is uniformity. It does not mean we force everyone into the same mold. I saw a cartoon, which pictured a youth talking to a religious leader. The youth had spiked hair, an earring and a chain around his neck and all the trendy clothes. Apparently this youth had made some kind of religious commitment. The religious leader was standing before the youth and saying, "You know young man that this means you are going to have to dress normally."

When you saw the religious leader he was wearing a bishop's hat that rises up about two feet with a cross on it. He carried a staff and wore a robe and an enormous cross. You wondered what this religious leader meant when he said dress normal. We do not force everyone into uniformity. When we talk about church unity we mean a unity of purpose. We mean a focus on Jesus Christ that gives us a common bond together. We hold these things in common and we move in the same direction.

I) The Source of Church Unity. Vs 27

Whatever happens conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. This could be a great life verse. It could be a theme for the whole of your Christian life. To live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Paul says there is a reason that he wants them to live worthy. He says that whether he comes or stays that there would be a unity of purpose. He knows he may come to see them again, but on the other hand Paul may not make it. He is saying whether I come or do not come you must be unified in purpose.

Illustration: Living worthy

So many times people wait for a key leader to come to get their act together. I remember when I worked for the Quaker Oats Company and the big corporate executives would come in and visit the manufacturing plant. They would announce their visit and we would prepare for weeks in advance. We would get ready for this big visit cleaning up every part of the premises. It was just right so that when they took their five-minute pass through our floor everything would look beautiful.

I have heard of dignitaries visiting cities. Where the dignitary would pass they would paint the front of the buildings in the poor broken down areas leaving the backside broken down. They painted just the front so the dignitaries would see fresh paint as they passed by. It was a façade. That is why government inspectors will arrive unannounced because it is easy to put up that kind of façade. Paul says (Philippians 1:27) whether I come or do not come you are to be living a life worthy of the gospel. It means an ongoing lifestyle. Not just getting ready for these moments. Not just when you are in the presence in other Christians and putting up some kind of front.

Living worthy of the gospel, this prescription for church unity means an ongoing Christian walk with God.

It means living for Christ day in and day out. The word that Paul uses was a Greek word that had to do with citizenship. Paul was bringing forth the idea that our citizenship was more than this earthly citizenship. We are citizens of heaven and we need to live worthy of that calling as citizens of heaven. It says, *whatever happens conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*. If you are using the King James Version it says, *have your conversation worthy of the gospel*. When the King James Version was written conversation had to do with whole lifestyle.

More than just words but everything that you do and say and how you act. So as believers, our whole life needs to be conformed to Christ. This is the prescription for to church unity. Our focus is really on Jesus and we are living and walking the lifestyle Christ has for us. That we are living a higher duty as citizens of heaven. Paul says it is because you live worthy that you will stand firm in one spirit.

The idea that Paul is bringing about is like a group of soldiers standing together in battle. It is as though they are entrenched in and holding their ground and won't move. They are not going to yield to circumstances. Paul knew the Philippians faced many difficulties. They had to go against the Roman law that seemed to be directly against their Christian stance. They had the problem that public opinion was against the Christians. They had problems of unbelief in their midst and they had the problems of skeptics around them.

Paul is saying live your life worthy of the gospel. Do not compromise, but make a stand to make sure of your Christian unity. Church unity for us does not mean that we all think alike, but we need this unity of purpose. It means that we allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives so we live a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the source of church unity. Paul goes on to tell us the results of church unity.

II) The Results of Church Unity. Vs 28

Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them, that they are not frightened. If our church is unified together then we are not going to be frightened. The word Paul uses is the word used when a horse would flinch. Have you seen when you move your arm near a horse and the horse flinches back?

Paul says if we are unified we are not going to be flinching. We are not moving back in the face of evil. Fear can be a tremendous thing. Fear can control people in so many ways. As a church we are not to be afraid of opposition. Paul is saying we are to be encouraged. When we are standing in church unity the results of that is that we are not flinching.

I remember once seeing a Pastor called Pastor Tom and he stood about six foot seven inches tall and he weighed about 250 pounds. He would walk tall afraid of nothing. I saw him walk into a spiritualist satanic type church to share the gospel. Here was a man unafraid. Here was a man who was not flinching.

What Paul is talking about is more than just a macho Christian image that walks into the face of evil. It is an inner quality of strength that comes from a daily walk with God. When we stand together unified we find that we draw strength from one another. We find a special strength that comes from God. It is not from human resources.

As the Philippians stood unified they had courage. They were unflinching. Paul said it would be evident in two ways. One of the evidences of standing unified is that those that oppose you will be destroyed. If we stand together unified as a body of Christ with a common purpose in Christ then those who oppose us will see a sign. They will read it like on a billboard; those who oppose us will be destroyed.

There is another message. Those standing together will be saved. It is a testimony of our own Christian faith when we stand together. How much in this day do we need a church that will stand together in unity. It will bring a testimony to the glory and honor of God. Our unity will sound together as a warning to those who would persecute the church. It is a testimony to our own salvation and a warning to those who would persecute us.

Paul gives us sense of unity that we live worthy of the Gospel. Paul gives us the result of unity that we live courageous Christian lives. Paul also gives us the test of unity that we endure suffering.

III) The Test of Church Unity Is That We Endure Suffering Vs. 29-30

You know a general in an army is going to choose his best soldiers for the hardest task. If there is something really difficult than he will take his best men and give the task to them. As soldiers of Christ the difficult tasks are going to be given to those really living the Christian life. Those who stand together in unity will face suffering and persecution. It happened there in Philippi. That church faced difficulties. Paul himself was beaten to the point of death and put in jail there in Philippi. Paul said, Vs.30 *you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.*

Paul was beaten and put in jail there in Philippi. Paul said you are facing these kinds of hardships that I faced and am still facing. Paul is writing from prison still undergoing these kinds of hardships. When we are together in Christian unity we can expect to face some kind of opposition. Paul refers to this kind of suffering as a grace. It was like a gift given to them. As odd as it seems that suffering would be a gift of God. Paul said in this way it is. This is not just any suffering, but that which comes in standing for Jesus Christ.

We live in a world where everybody suffers. Christians and non-Christians get a cold, flu or have a car accident. This is not unique to Christians. This is not the kind of suffering that Paul is saying the Philippian Christians are graced with. It is when we stand unified that we may suffer persecution because of our stance. It is in this time of persecution for righteousness sake that we say Christians have been graced with a certain type of suffering. When we suffer for Christ's sake that is glorious. How we stand when persecution comes is the test of unity. Do people splinter off or do we really stand unified in purpose?

Christians face difficulty when they really stand for the cause of Christ. There are those that oppose the cause of Christ. There are those who will cause difficulties for anyone who preaches the gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

I often wonder what happened at this church on June 23 at 7:00 PM. There was a vote taken for us to my call as pastor. There were three missionaries present here from a cult that night. They came here not to worship Christ, but to look to bring dissatisfied people into their fold. They came here with that purpose in mind, but they saw an amazing unity among the believers here in this church. The Scripture says that unity makes a testimony. We voted that night with a one hundred percent unity. I wonder what went through their minds when the Gospel was preached here that night.

Church unity starts by living worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to live worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ until you have committed your heart to Christ. Won't you commit yourself to Christ at this very moment?

I know God has great plans and great purpose for this church. It could be threatened by disharmony. From people not being likeminded. We need to pray and use these incentives to claim like-mindedness for the sake and cause of Jesus Christ.

Humility: The Key to a Like-minded Church

Philippians 2: 1-4

Introduction

There was a young man who was a candidate for the ministry. He was about to preach his very first sermon. As he went up to preach he new he was well prepared and he had confidence in his abilities. Before he started to preach the veteran pastor who saw him approach the pulpit with an attitude of pride just shook his head. The young man preached his first sermon and he failed miserably. He left the pulpit in humility after such a failure.

The young preacher asked the veteran pastor what happened, I was so confident and prepared? The veteran pastor told him, "If you had gone up the way you came down, you would have come down the way you went up." Sometimes we fail miserably because of foolish pride. The Bible calls us to humility, Especially in these verses Philippians 2:1-4.

How often do we ourselves fail because our own foolish pride causes us to act in the flesh rather than in humility and depend on the Lord? Paul in these verses is writing to the Philippian Christians. He wants them to be like-minded. He wants there to be harmony in their church so he gives them the keys to church harmony. The main aspect of to church harmony is humility. Paul gives the Christians incentives for being like-minded.

Paul speaks of the great mercies we have from our Lord. Paul uses these great mercies of God to motivate the Philippians. He wants them to be like-minded. To motivate them to be like-minded he does not use manipulation or a guilt trip. Paul uses mercy incentives. We would do well to think of these incentives and apply them to our hearts. That we too would be like-minded as a fellowship. It is an attitude that Paul wants the people of Philippi to have. More than just a mental like-mindedness, but an emotional attitude of putting Jesus Christ first in their life. He uses these incentives so they would be like-minded, all with the same purpose in Jesus Christ.

We see these incentives that Paul talks about. He says, vs. 1 *"If you have any encouragement in being united in Christ."*

I) Being united with Jesus Christ is incentive for like-mindedness.

Becoming a Christian you are united with Jesus Christ. If that is not incentive for like-mindedness, then I do not know what is. To think back that we as sinners have been saved by grace and that we are united with Christ is a great a great incentive for us to be like-minded as a church body.

Illustration-Away from the Lord

I think back on my own life, wondering for years apart from the Lord. I talked about this with a friend of mine in college. After I became a Christian he showed me a prayer list that he had. He had been praying for twenty people in our fraternity to become Christians. I said to him as I looked at that list, and he was a good friend of mine, one thing I want to ask you about. We are good friends and my name was not on that list? Why were you were not praying for me? He said you know why? I did not think you would become a Christian. I thought your heart was too hard to become a Christian. He thought my heart was too hard, yet the Lord saved me miraculously, I was that one whose heart was so hardened.

When I think of the great incentive of being united in Christ, all that I did while I was apart from the Lord, yet Jesus Christ came into my life and I became united with Christ. I am sure there are many people here who can think back on their own life away from the Lord, whether in a dramatic way or just in a way of attitude you did things displeasing to the Lord. For you, now you think, how wonderful it is that I am united with Christ!

What an incentive for like-mindedness. This is what Paul used for the Philippians to become like-minded and this should be our incentive for being like-minded. Think how wonderful it is that we are united with Christ. Let that be an incentive for like-mindedness and church harmony. Paul does not stop there with this incentive. He uses another incentive. It is the very love of Christ.

II) The Love of Christ is an incentive for like-mindedness Vs. 1

There could be no stronger love than the love of Christ. Paul uses this love as an incentive for the Christians in Philippi to be like-minded. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this than one lay down his life for his friends." What a tremendous love to love someone so much to lay down your life for that person. Here is Jesus Christ and he loved us so much that he laid down his life willingly that we might know eternal life. This love can hardly be grasped it is so wonderful. This should be an incentive for us to be like-minded. How often do we think about this great love that Christ showed for us? Let this be an incentive for our church to serve with one purpose having this like-mindedness.

Paul says being united with Jesus Christ is an incentive for like-mindedness. He says the love of Christ is an incentive for like-mindedness and he tells us the fellowship of the Holy Spirit should be an incentive for our like-mindedness.

III) The fellowship of the Holy Spirit should be an incentive for us to be like-minded. Vs2

The Holy Spirit is the great comforter. The great empowered for the Christian life. As a Christian you have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that works in our lives and enables us to be like-minded as Christians and to have our purpose focused on Jesus Christ. It should be that gift of the Holy Spirit that not only empowers us to be like-minded, but also motivates us to church harmony and to want to serve together as like-minded people.

In the Bible a man made the mistake of thinking he could buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. He saw miracles happening through the power of the Holy Spirit and he offered money for the Holy Spirit.

We need to remember, as the Bible makes clear, the Holy Spirit is not for sale. The Holy Spirit is a gift God gives to his children. This gift of the Holy Spirit should be an incentive for us to serve together for the purpose and cause of Jesus Christ.

IV) Human compassion alone is a motivation for Humility.

If all these were not incentive enough in Vs. 1 Paul says, "*If there is any compassion and any tenderness.*" In other words if all these incentives have not motivated you, just for human pity sake won't you be like-minded? Human compassion alone should be enough to motivate us to be church harmony and live together in like-mindedness. Even Aristotle said that man was never meant to be like a pack of snarling wolves, but to live together in fellowship and in expression of deep feeling.

How can we be unmoved by these incentives Paul gives us? So many people today are trying to motivate people through a kind of false incentive or guilt trip, but Paul only motivates through what is pure, what is right and what is good. These great incentives, to know the unity of Jesus Christ, the love of Jesus Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, human compassion, won't that motivate us to serve together like-minded with one purpose together?

Paul uses three ideas to express this. He speaks of being like-minded or having the same love or being one in the spirit. He uses three ideas to motivate them to this like-mindedness. It is like piling one idea on the other to emphasize the importance. That we would serve together like minded in one common purpose of Jesus Christ.

You see disharmony threatened the fellowship there in Philippi. So many times in our day too disunity and disharmony threaten the church fellowship. Paul is calling Christians to be like-minded. He calls us to one common purpose in Jesus Christ. The high call of a unity of a like-mindedness and a unity in our lives. To have peace in our lives and in our church.

I know God has great plans and great purpose for this church. It could be threatened by disharmony. From people not being likeminded. We need to pray and use these incentives to claim like-mindedness for the sake and cause of Jesus Christ.

Paul gives the real key to harmony in Vs.3. This key, if we are going to be harmonious Christians, if we are going to live in harmony with ourselves and as a body of believers is our need. in Vs 3 we are told it is humility. Humility is what will cause us to be like-minded and have harmony in our fellowship. Paul states it in two ways.

The first way he states it is negatively. Avoiding selfish ambition negatively states it. Avoid vain conceit. Earlier in the book of Philippians Paul talked about a group of preachers who were preaching out of selfish ambition and vain conceit. Paul was saying if we are to have harmony in our fellowship then these are what we must avoid. How often do we put our own self-interests ahead of the interests of the Lord? We need to avoid all selfish interests. It is one of the great temptations. It may be a greater temptation than money or all the material things that are tempting people. This is the great temptation of self-interest.

We are so often looking to our own needs. How tempting is it to desire the honored place at a banquet or to be sought after and known in public. In all these things we put our own interest before the interest of others. The aim in Christianity is never promoting self-interests. As a matter of fact the aim in Christianity is crucifying self. We are to put our own self-interest down and lift up the interests of Jesus Christ.

Illustration- Fame

I remember seeing a great cyclist that I had admired so much of for a long time. They made a movie about his life and that movie won an academy award. He won the race I was watching and he was up on the winner's platform. In his speech he simply said, "Fame is but a fleeting moment in time." There is no use seeking after self-interests that are so fleeting. Only the purpose of Jesus Christ and like-mindedness in his purposes is truly eternal.

The great Christians of the past are not the ones who were seeking the important offices, but they even would shrink from them. Even the great reformer John Knox said he shrank from the responsibilities before him. He is known far and wide for spreading the flames of reformation, but yet he did not seek after self-interest or fame. He wanted only the interest of Jesus Christ. That is the key to avoid selfish ambition.

Paul not only says to avoid selfish ambition, but he states it in a positive way he says, Vs. 3 *"In humility count others better than yourself."* We need to do more than just putting our self-interest aside, but we need to look to the interest of others. Have you ever seen the poster that has the word JOY? It says Jesus first, Others second and then Yourself. That is the key to humility. Putting Jesus Christ first and others before yourself. If we are going to have joy in our lives it is going to come through putting the interest of others ahead of our own interests.

Humility is the opposite of pride. But what humility is not, is weakness. If we have a low self-esteem and allow people to run all over us that is not humility. Humility is a strength of character. Humility is to look to another person and see their interests and to count them as more important than your own. That does not come from weakness but from strength. It takes strength to look out for others. Humility is a call to high Christian character. It is a call to strength.

So many people are involved in a false humility. Someone could be an excellent concert pianist who plays all over the United States and they may say, "Oh I am no good at the piano, don't say I am any good at all." That is not humility, that is speaking something that is false. Humility is dependence on God and to acknowledge that God gave you what you have. That it is only through God that you can do and say what you do. That is what humility really is, dependence on God.

If you look through the Bible you will notice that every time you see the characteristic of humility you will see that characteristic is praised and every time you see pride that characteristic is rebuked. If we want to be effective as Christians then we need to do so in an attitude of humility. We need to think more of our fellow servants in Christ than we think of our own needs. This is the great need.

Illustration-Humility

One time F. B. Meyer said that he felt like God's gifts were on a shelf and the taller he got the more he could reach the gifts of God. Then he said that he became wiser and realized that God's gifts were on a shelf. But it was not becoming taller that he could reach the gifts it was as he stooped in humility he could reach the gifts of God. Humility is the key to harmony and the key to being used by Christ as a church fellowship. We need a spirit of humility.

In Vs 4 Paul expands on this key to humility, He says, "*Look to the interests of others.*" The situation in the Church of Philippi is that there was self-interest seeking. Paul is saying, no. Look to the interest of others. Let that be more important. His intention for them was to express real humility in the way of unselfishness.

Illustration-Credit

A football player had lost a great football game and he was speaking on the telephone and he said we would have won this game had we only had a blocking back. His little son heard him and said, "Daddy I want to grow up to be a blocking back." Then the boy asked, "Daddy what is a blocking back?" The father said it is someone who does all the work but does not get any of the credit. That is what humility brings about. Seeking to do the work for Jesus Christ, but not looking for the credit. That is what is called for in our church today is an attitude of humility.

We all have interests that we need to think of, health, financial matters, and our basic needs in life. It is not wrong to take care of these needs in our life. But what the Bible is calling us to is to go beyond chiefly looking to our own needs. But to look out for the interests of others. That is what we need is for those to look to the interest, not just of themselves, but also of others.

Conclusion

I was discussing with my wife about the literacy training that goes on in our church on Monday nights when they teach English. She told me about one of the participants who stood up when asked why are you involved in this program? One lady said, "I had a disease when I was young and I have never been able to give blood. This literacy training is something I can do to help others." There is the attitude of humility. Asking how you can help others, not just looking out for self-interests.

Won't you heed the call Paul gives to the Philippians? It is the call to humility. Those of you who studied the Sunday school lesson this morning learned of a tax collector beating his chest because he was so dissatisfied with his life. There was a religious Pharisee contrasted who had so much pride in his own

self-worth. You know which one truly went away blessed. It was the one who had humility. Won't you give your life to Christ and taking on this humility?

The question is asked far too often, "What is in it for me?" The question we need to ask instead is, "How can I help others?" The call is to be concerned about others' needs. We need to be concerned not just with people's physical needs, but with their spiritual needs too. There are so many around us that have spiritual needs because they do not know Jesus Christ. They do not know that if they put their faith in Jesus Christ that they will have eternal life. We need to be thinking about their interests, that they need to know Jesus.

The Example of Christ Philippians 2:5-11

We will look at one of the greatest passages on our Lord Jesus Christ and we will look at what he did in paying the penalty for your sin and my sin. This is not a story of rags to riches but one who went from Majesty to Humility.

In the book of Philippians Paul has been exhorting his readers to a lifestyle of humility and to put aside selfish interests. He had been encouraging them in this way of humility and now in his final argument for this call to humility he draws upon the greatest example ever known, the example of Jesus Christ. We are going to examine the great example of Jesus Christ and what he did to go the dramatic distance of the Majesty of God to a despicable criminal's death on the cross.

Never has anyone gone so far in humility. Never has there been an example like what we find in Jesus Christ. Let's read one of the great passages on our Lord Jesus Christ.

Vs.5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Vs. 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

Vs 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Vs. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!

Vs. 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

Vs.10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,

Vs. 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I) The Example of Jesus in Humility Vs 5-7

In vs. 5 Paul says, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." In other words you should think those thoughts that Christ thought. You should have the mind of Christ that was expressed in the incarnation. By incarnation we mean when Holy God became man. That is the attitude we should have, an attitude of humility that makes us willing to give up what we have for the sake of others. We tend to think of our own self-interests. We tend to think of our own rights. We have created a "me generation." Everyone thinking of his or her own needs and not about those of others.

This is a day when we need to look to the example of Jesus Christ who is the ultimate example of true humility. There was no limit to the amount of humility that he demonstrated. Despite his divine majesty he took off those heavenly robes and came down in the form of humanity.

In verse six we see the emphasis on the great majesty of Christ. It says, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." It said he is in very nature God. Jesus is God almighty. If you are really going to appreciate the true humility of Jesus Christ the key is to grasp this aspect of Jesus that he was almighty God.

Paul without any apology asserts that Jesus Christ was God. His glory was the very glory of God. Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. What did Paul mean by this? In other words, Jesus was God in his nature and did not need to hold on to that. He did not need to defend it. He was God. He did not have to consider this something to be grasped or held on too. Jesus possessed the glory of God. It was not something he had to defend, hold on too or fight for.

It is amazing when we consider what the Bible tells us when man first committed sin in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve ate of the fruit and they were tempted because they would be like God. In other words they wanted to receive the majesty to become like God. It brought the fall to the world.

Now here is Jesus Christ who had that, who is God. He does not hold on to that but willingly humbled himself. Vs 7 says, He was made nothing. He emptied himself, stripped himself of all insignia, all outward appearance of the divine to walk as human flesh on this earth. To take on the full nature of a man. Like a king who would discard his robes and his crown to walk among the peasants and be one with them. Jesus Christ put aside his heavenly robes and became one of us. He became a man just like us. Taking on the nature of a servant. Jesus Christ came not to be served, but to serve. That was his humility. He possessed supreme authority yet he became a servant.

Christ it says, being found in human form. Here is his true humanity. Jesus became human. He didn't just appear as God with the appearance of a body. He became human. Jesus took on the full human nature with all the human characteristics. He grew in a human society as each of us has. He being God took on full humanity.

There were two things that Jesus could not do before he took on humanity. He could not suffer and he could not die. But now these are things he could do to the full extent. Because he humbled himself he would know suffering as no one had ever known suffering before. He would know death, even the most despicable death of a criminal. He experienced that humility of humbling himself to the point of death.

Paul wants to communicate a message to the Philippians. He wants to communicate a message of humility. He is telling them they need to put their own selfish interests aside and follow the example of Jesus Christ in humility. It is the ultimate illustration of humility. Jesus humbled himself.

Humility is the example of Christ. If you say, "I want to be a good Christian," you must follow Christ in the attitude of humility. Only if you will humble yourself and allow Jesus to be your example and motivate you to the service in humility will you truly be able to be the Christian that you would like to be and that God would have you to be.

II) The Example of Jesus in Obedience. Vs 8

We see that Christ set an example of humility. In verse 8 we see a further example of Jesus Christ. We see the example of obedience. Jesus Christ was obedient. His example extends beyond humility to obedience. Jesus placed himself as a servant to do God's will and he never shrank from that. Jesus was human like other men, yet he was different in that he was perfectly obedient. He never was disobedient at any time to what God would have for him. He lived always in the will of God. Jesus obedience went to the ultimate, that of death. He was obedient unto death. There is the ultimate test of obedience.

Here we see Jesus set the ultimate example of obedience. He was obedient to the point of death. His whole mission in coming to earth was about that death on the cross. He came to die. He was obedient and never shrank from his mission, which included death. He went beyond merely death, but he died a shameful death. A death of crucifixion the most degrading death known. It was torturous and shameful. It was to be a curse to die on a cross. Jesus was willing to go to that extreme of death on a cross.

Today when someone is sentenced to death it is through a lethal injection. A death that is painless and private. The cross was the extreme of torture, the most painful and public. They chose the cross because it was the most disgraceful death. Jesus was obedient to death, even death on a cross. What a contrast to go from a throne of glory to a death as dishonorable as the cross. To be God all-powerful and to go to the cross seemingly helpless. To be the savior of the world and to die on the cross and be mocked when they said, "You saved others why don't you save yourself?" What an example of obedience Jesus showed.

It was because of your sin and my sin and God's love that Jesus took this step of obedience. His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow. Jesus Christ fell on his face and said to his Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me. Let me not go through this on the cross. It is so terrible but he said, nevertheless, not my will but yours. It was an example of complete and willing obedience.

If Christ was willing to do this for you won't you live in obedience for him? That is how Paul wanted to motivate the Philippians to be obedient. He used the example of Jesus and his ultimate obedience to the Father. This should be an example for all of us to commit ourselves to complete obedience to Jesus Christ.

Jesus said if you obey my commands you will remain in my love. He said just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and abide in his love. Jesus was obedient to the Father and experienced the great love that the Father has. They had a great relationship because of his obedience. Jesus is saying to each one of you, if you will obey His commands and be obedient to Christ you will abide in the love of Christ as He abided in the love of the Father.

You know the cross was not the end. That was simply the entrance into glory. When we put a cross up as a symbol, we put an empty cross because Jesus rose again and his death on the cross was not the final word. It was an entrance to the glorification and victory of Jesus Christ. It was because Jesus defeated death on the cross that we celebrate new life in Christ. It was because of his obedience that we have Good News and a story to tell.

Seeking our own glory ends in destruction. Adam and Eve sought their own glory and it brought the fall of the human race. But Jesus Christ thought of others and it meant salvation and redemption available to the human race.

III) The Example of Jesus results in Exaltation Vs 9-11

We have seen Jesus in humility. Now we see that he is exalted. He is raised high above all others. God responded to Christ's humility and obedience. Jesus who was betrayed and died on the cross is now exalted. Vs. 9 says, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name." Jesus exaltation is complete. He is given the highest name.

The Bible says in Vs 10-11, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Jesus went through the humiliation. He was obedient. In response to this obedience God exalted him to the highest.

It is the way of glory through the cross. The Bible calls all of us to crucify ourselves. To take up our cross daily. We are to die to our own needs and our selfish interest. We are to crucify our own selfish interests that we might live to Christ. The implication of all this is not only that Jesus Christ is exalted, but that when we are obedient to Christ and follow his example through humility and obedience we share in that glory. Those who truly put their faith in Christ and trust in Christ and live the Christian life will share a glory in heaven with Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

It is wonderful news and needs to be spread all over the world that Jesus Christ died and we can share in his exaltation. There is more to Christian life than worship here on earth. We have a glorious future in Jesus Christ. The first step is through true humility. It is to come to Jesus Christ and acknowledge you are a sinner.

Jesus died because he wants you to experience new life. We must follow his example of humility. We must come to him and admit we are not good enough. We will never reach God standards. But only to allow Christ's death on the cross to count for our lives. That we put our faith and trust in Jesus.

What keeps people from Christ? Why are there so many without an interest in Jesus? It is because of foolish pride. They think they do not need Jesus that they are good enough so God will take care of them. But that could not be farther from the truth. The Bible makes it clear that no one is good enough to receive eternal life unless they come through Jesus Christ. Each one needs to humble himself and place their faith in Jesus Christ.

Don't ignore the things that are most important, the eternal things. Come to Jesus Christ today.

Shine your Light for Christ

Philippians 2:12-18

There was a family who, as many times happens, had trouble getting along with their neighbors. They argued back and forth and finally one of the neighbors was about to go on vacation. They hoped that this might reduce the tension between the two.

After one family left on vacation the one still at home noticed that their dog had gone from their fence into the neighbor's fenced yard. Not only had the dog gone into the neighbor's fence, but by the time they saw the dog it had the neighbor's pet rabbit in its mouth and was shaking it.

When they finally got their dog back into its pen they discovered the neighbors pet rabbit was dead. So this incident would not cause more tension they decided to clean the rabbit up, give it a bath, dry it off with a hair dryer, comb it and put it back into the rabbit cage. They thought that this would cover up any more problems that could arise between the two families.

When the other family returned from vacation they went into their back yard. There was screaming coming from the neighbors when they went to their back yard where the rabbit cage was. They ran to the back yard and asked the neighbors, "What is wrong? Did your rabbit die?"

The neighbors told them that before they left on vacation the rabbit died and they buried it in the garden. Now the rabbit is back in the rabbit cage again.

Sometimes we need a lesson in Christian conduct. Paul knows that when he writes the Philippians. He wants to give them guidance in their Christian conduct. That is what Paul does and he tells them about living the Christian life. Paul has just finished presenting about the example of Christ. How Jesus went from being clothed in all the Majesty of God then stooping down, taking on humanity, Christ humbled himself in obedience, even obedience to the point of death on a cross.

The passage on the obedience of Christ, the great example of Christ is connected to this passage that we are looking at here. Read Philippians 2:12-18

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. 17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

We see in Vs. 2 the word therefore. This whole passage is connected to the example of Christ. Paul is saying to the Philippians, Jesus Christ is God and he humbled himself as no one ever has. He became obedient and demonstrated the greatest example of humility. That word therefore means, now live under that Lordship of Christ who was exalted. Paul gives this kind of command.

Before we think that Paul has brought a harsh command we need to look at the way Paul brought this command. He says, “My dear friends.” So here is Paul giving this example of Christ and then, in a manner of love, uses Christ’s example to tell the Philippian Christians that they need to be living under the Lordship of Christ. They need to have the right Christian Conduct in their life. Paul is motivating them in love, to a deeper level of obedience.

Paul says to them, Vs 12, You have always obeyed. Paul refers to their obedience in the past. Paul knew well of their past obedience. He had ministered in their midst and they had taken care of him. He had seen them take their stand for Christ. So Paul reminds them of that in the past they had been obedient and faithful to Jesus.

Then we come to a phrase in Scripture that might startle some of us. Paul says, “Work out your salvation.” We ask ourselves, work out our salvation? Is this the same Paul who wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God? He has talked about salvation by grace all this time and now Paul says work out your salvation?”

Paul is not talking here about initial salvation. He is talking about one who became a Christian and now goes on in the Christian life. He is talking about salvation in the sense of living the Christian life. There are three aspects of salvation that the Bible speaks of. Salvation past, that point in time when we become a Christian. Salvation present, that is after we become a Christian and we go on living the Christian life. That is what Paul is talking about here. There is also a salvation future. That time that we spend with God in heaven. That glorification time is salvation future.

Here Paul is speaking about salvation present. We sometimes refer to this as sanctification. He says work out your salvation. We don’t become Christians through doing good works. It is by the grace of God, by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. But once we become Christians, then we have the need to grow in our Christian lives by the good works that we do. We never want to make the mistake of thinking that becoming a Christian is the end result. That is only the beginning. Once we put our faith in Christ and become a Christian then we only begin to live the Christian life. We must do our good works and grow in relationship from the faith that we have in Christ.

Paul tells us a way we are to live out our Christian life. He said we are to live out our Christian life with fear and trembling. Paul is not giving us a picture of someone standing knock-kneed and trembling before God. He is talking instead about a legitimate fear and reverence of God. When we live our Christian life we must do so holding a healthy respect for the holiness of God. That is what Paul means by working out your salvation with fear and trembling. To always have a reverence and remembering that God is almighty. Living this way will take away all arrogance. It would cause us to be aware of pride and take away self-righteousness when we live out our salvation with fear and trembling, remembering the righteousness of God.

Paul begins to bring the other side to this truth. Not only does he call on us to work out our salvation, but he reminds us Vs 13, *“It is God who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose.”* In other words that while we as believers are doing good works, the Holy Spirit dwells in our lives and we need to be submitting to Christ so Christ can work through us. When we love our enemies it is Christ through us loving our enemies. *God who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose.* So are we to do good works as Christians? Yes. Is it us who does these good works? No, not really. It is Christ in us working through us. Here is a balance of two truths. Our own good works and God working through us.

You know before you become a Christian God does not work through you. He may work on you, but not through you. Have you ever had the experience when you meet someone and begin to tell them about the message of Jesus Christ? You tell them and they respond that is amazing that you would bring that us. They say, It seems like in the past two weeks I have run into several people who have told me what you are telling me. That is God working on that person. The Holy Spirit is doing a work of conviction in their lives.

When you become a Christian God is in you. You accept Christ and the Holy Spirit dwells in your life and God works through you to bring about these good works he has prepared for you. Paul balanced two truths. These truths represents our human freedom as individuals, yet it keeps in mind God is sovereign and all-powerful.

Paul has more to say about the Christian life. He says that you need to live out your Christian life before the world around us. In Vs. 14 he tells the Philippians that they are to do everything without complaining or grumbling. Grumbling is not worthy of the Christian calling. The theme in Paul’s letter is joy. The opposite of joy is grumbling. If we are going to live for Christ it must be out of joy and not out of complaining. It is not the first time in the Bible that we see mention of grumbling among God’s children. Even in the Old Testament the children of Israel while wandering in the wilderness would complain, even when God was good to them. We need to be careful that we don’t serve God in an attitude of grumbling.

Our attitude is to be that of joy. If we complain and grumble then it is a sign of an inward spiritual problem. If we do what we do out of grumbling or complaining than we are not truly as God wants us to be. It is only when we have a joy in what we do that we are as Christ would have us to be. We need to be right with God and that means having joy in our life.

Paul draws a contrast between the world and the church. Paul talks as shining as lights before the world. He begins to talk of the world. He says the world is crooked and depraved. Here is Paul talking nearly two thousand years ago about the culture that he lived in. It was depraved and crooked. Paul knew very well the condition of Philippi. He had been there. He had been arrested for casting out a spirit from a fortuneteller who was gaining people profit. He was arrested and beaten for preaching the gospel there. He knew they were living in a crooked and depraved city.

Even today we can say the same descriptions hold true for the society around us. I would not have to spend too much time to convince you that the community that we live in is filled with a system that goes

against God. All you need to do is pick up the newspaper or watch the news to find out that there is corruption around us. Paul says in his day they had that and in our day we have that as well.

If we have that then what are we to do? Paul says, Vs 15 we are to live as lights before this dark world. The more darkness that prevails the more opportunity we have to shine as Christians. That is what Paul tells them to do, shine as stars.

We live in a city that is filled with streetlights. If you get away from the city out into the country where there is no city illumination you look up in the sky it is so black, so dark. You notice in the dark sky it seems like the stars are shining brighter. When you see the sky away from all the lights you say, I never realized there were so many stars and they shine so brightly. Because we live in a world filled with depravity that gives us the opportunity to shine brightly for Christ.

As a matter of fact that is how I first recognized the need for the gospel. It wasn't at a Christian college but at a secular university where darkness was as dark as it could be. In this I saw several individuals shining for Christ in stark contrast to the world around them. I could see the difference because the world was so dark.

We live where the darkness prevails. At the same time it becomes an opportunity to shine our lights. Wherever we go, work, school or in the marketplace we have an opportunity to shine our light for Jesus. We can be on the cutting edge. The conditions the Philippians are in are also much like what we have, darkness around us. It is an opportunity to shine like stars against a dark sky.

Paul felt the success of his own life was intertwined with that of the Philippians. Paul said to them, how you live your life is going to make a difference. It will determine whether I did all that for you in vain or if it is really going to count for something. Paul was willing to sacrifice his own life. But not just for any reason, but for a purpose. That those Philippian Christians would be truly living their lives for Jesus Christ.

What Paul is expressing is often on the hearts of spiritual leaders that pour their lives into trying to equip Christians. If those Christians become cool and distant to the things of Christ then they feel that they have run for nothing, that it is all for not. That is what Paul was expressing. Only when the Philippians were really living for Christ was all that he did, all that he sacrificed going to be worth it.

When Paul stands at the judgment seat before Christ and those Philippians were receiving their reward and hearing Jesus say, "Well done good and faithful servant it" would all be worth it. We need to be running as a torchbearer would run. Holding his torch and not being distracted by any difficulties around us. We need to live shining before this dark generation.

Paul also speaks about Christian conduct in terms of rejoicing. In Vs 17 –18 he speaks about this rejoicing. Why is Paul always rejoicing? Why does he make a big deal out of joy? Is it because everything is going his way with all the circumstances the way he would have planned them? It is just the opposite. Paul is in prison. Everything has gone against him. He does not know how his trial is going to come out. As far as Paul knew he is going to be martyred. He is there in prison facing the possibility of death, yet his true joy came from the strength of the Lord.

That is why Paul knew joy. It is only when our joy is in the Lord that we really experience joy. Paul uses an unusual term. He says, Vs 17, I may be poured out like a drink offering. I remember once on an evangelistic crusade and as we went around telling people about Christ one of the leaders prayed that we would be poured out as a drink offering. I was thinking yes, that must mean that we pour ourselves out for Christ. Little did I know what this actually meant. Paul was using this phrase to speak of his own martyrdom. When he said, even if I am being poured out like a drink offering, he was referring to, even if

he is martyred. He might be killed for the cause of Christ yet he said even in this I am glad and I rejoice with all of you.

To know what Paul was referring to we need to look at the Old Testament and the sacrifices that were in place. In Numbers 15 it is explained that there is a sacrifice on the altar. On that sacrifice the priest would pour out a wine drink that would be poured out on the altar along with the sacrifice to go up to God. Paul was saying your faith is the sacrifice and my own martyrdom is like the drink offering being poured out. He said in the midst of all this I am glad and rejoice and he said I encourage you, I urge you to rejoice in the same way.

If we want our Christian conduct to make a difference before this dark world then we must do so with joy. Even when the circumstances aren't going our way it is time to live our Christian lives with joy. All throughout the Old Testament and New Testament God's people are always linked to joy. If you read the Psalms you see the joy of the Lord is linked closely with being near to the presence of God. Truly walking in the ways of God is interlinked with knowing joy. That is our goal of Christian conduct. That we live so close to Christ that we will experience joy even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

It is OK as Christians to express our joy that others see this. It is OK too if we are outwardly reserved in our joy. But the key thing is that we are experiencing Christian joy. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that somberness is equivalent to the nearness of God. It says just the opposite. That the joyful life is interlinked to a true relationship with God. We need to remember that joy should be a part of our Christian life. It needs to be a characteristic for all Christians to experience joy. Even having joy in the midst of suffering.

That is what makes Christian joy different from the joy the world offers. The world offers a kind of joy that if you have all these material things and a high status you can experience joy. But Christian joy comes in the midst of suffering and troubles. That is the difference in the true Christian joy we seek. It will last because it is based on a relationship with Christ.

As Christians we need to remember that our lights must shine before a dark world. If we are not truly living close to Christ then our lights are not shining. It becomes dim like the lighted sky of a city and you do not see much. When we really live for Christ our light becomes very bright before a dark world. This begins when you put your faith in Christ. Christian conduct is first and foremost based on a relationship with Christ. Your good works follow putting faith in Christ.

This passage of scripture shows us the example of Timothy who stands for Christ. That is the great need in the church, for those who will demonstrate genuine Christian character.

Christian Character

Philippians 2:19-24

Introduction

Often we get useful information from the Gallop polls. One Gallup poll taken has produced statistics that will shock many of us. In some ways the outcome was positive. In some ways the outcome of the poll was very negative. The poll found that never in the history of America had church attendance been so high. That is encouraging that church attendance is so high in America. We look back and we tend to glorify the days past as a time when church attendance was at an all time high. But according to the Gallup poll never in the history of America has the attendance of Christianity been so high as it is now.

But then the second part of the poll revealed the discouraging aspect of this poll. Never in the history of America had church attendance made such little difference. In other words many are attending church, many are coming more than ever before, but the problem is the influence from the Christians is less. We have a real problem in the absence of Christian character today.

The passage of scripture we will study today addresses this problem. In Philippians chapter 2 beginning with verse 19 to verse 24 we have the example of Timothy, the great servant of God. Paul holds forth Timothy as an example of someone who stands for Christ and who is willing to make an impact. It is important today that we hold up Timothy as an example of one who stands with Christian Character. That is what we need in the church today.

Read Philippians 2:19-24

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

Here is Timothy, a man who can be trusted. Here is Timothy, a man who shows genuine concern to those around him. Here is Timothy, a man who is dedicated in his service to Jesus Christ. That is the call for the Christian. That is the great need in the church, for those who will demonstrate genuine Christian character.

Who around us stands as our example today for Christian character? You may have those you look to as an example of Christian character. Paul says we have a biblical example of Christian character in Timothy. Earlier Paul had talked about the greatest example of all, that of Jesus. Paul told us that Jesus being God almighty throned in majesty, humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. Some people might say that is too much. I could never live up to the example of Jesus Christ. So Paul brings the example closer to home. Here is Timothy, someone who struggles with the same weaknesses we have. Timothy was an ordinary man just willing to submit himself to Christ and be used. This makes him a great biblical example of Christian character.

Paul in this passage of Scripture is telling us of his travel plans. You see Paul is at this time in prison. He is writing this letter to the Philippians from prison and is telling them what he plans to do because they are very worried. Paul was the one who started the church in Philippi. So he is telling them in this letter that Apphroditus will be bringing back the letter to them. In the church of Philippi there is a great problem of disunity and strife. Paul wants to know if this letter is going to make a difference in impacting

them. So he says that later he is going to send Timothy to them. He has no one else like Timothy. A man of great character to go to them and tell them what the outcome of Paul's trial is.

Paul is waiting to find out, will he be martyred or set free to continue to preach the gospel? He has found in Timothy one who is worthy to take on a great task. Timothy will go back to Philippi and give them the news of what has happened to Paul. Timothy will then take back the news to Paul if they are responding to Paul's letter, or is there still strife and discord in the church.

So Paul is looking around for one who will stand up to this task and only Timothy is found worthy. He is the great example of Christian character. Timothy met Paul on Paul's missionary journey and Timothy accompanied Paul. When Paul was in prison Timothy was with him there in Philippi. Here Paul is writing from prison and Timothy is again standing by. It says something right there about his Christian character. He is willing to stand with those who are in trouble. The first thing we see as far as the Christian Character of Timothy is that Timothy is a man to be trusted. Paul had a great trust in Timothy. All through his imprisonment it was Timothy that he trusted.

D) Christian Character means you can be trusted. Vs 21

Paul sends Timothy to Philippi for those two reasons. First of all Paul wants Timothy to report the outcome of his trial to the church. Secondly Paul wants Timothy to find out the news about the Philippian church problems and carry back a report. Paul needs someone he can rely on for this so he sends Timothy as his personal representative. Paul trusts Timothy as his right hand man.

We read in verse 21: *For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.*

So Paul is saying in the midst of all the people (even in his day) who are more interested in their own interests than the service of the gospel, there is one man who is an example. Paul had mentioned in his letter that the preachers around his area of Rome were preaching out of selfish motivation. They were preaching from wrong motives. Paul may have asked others if they would go on this journey. And they may have refused to go but Timothy is the one who would stand up and be counted. It is a sad commentary for Christians in Paul's day that nobody was worthy for this journey but this one man, Timothy.

What about in our own day? Do we have those that stand up with Christian character? We hear that today the church attendance is going great, but true Christian character is a rare commodity. How wonderful it is when someone will really stand up with Christian character in this day. Paul made a comment about his day that could also be made today. Many people are more concerned about their own self-interests than they are about the ministry of Jesus Christ.

We need men and women who will be an example like Timothy, who can be trusted. Even when Jesus ministered to the multitudes, but rarely did the multitudes follow him. It was just a small band of disciples. All through out the Old Testament there is the theme of the holy remnant. It seems like throughout the history of the church there has been just a small band who really stand up. There have always been lots and lots of people who are professed followers, but those who truly stand committed are few indeed. There is the desperate need in our generation for people who will say, "I do not care what the others do or say I am going to stand up and live a life with Christian character." It is rare to find a man like Timothy who is anxious to promote the welfare of others instead of his own interests.

One Christian leader who knew how rare Christian character is said, "Rather than give me one hundred people who have gained a world vision, give me instead five people who will keep that vision." You see the kind of challenge he is giving? He understands the situation as was revealed in the Gallop poll. There may be many people attending church. Church attendance may be higher in America than ever before, but it is rare to see people really standing with Christian commitment.

Last Wednesday I spoke to a group of college students at the University. The Student director asked me to speak to them about Christian commitment. He knew the need of our day is for Christians who will stand for Christ. It is too easy to just drift with the tide.

They are amongst students who are not concerned about moral values. They are in an environment that calls for Christian character. It is needed among young people today, but it is needed among every generation. All of us face temptations with academics or tax forms or in business. We face the challenges to cut the corners and cheat. But Christ calls us to honor him in every situation.

He calls us to a live of Christian character. And that is the example we see in Timothy. We need people who really will make a difference in our society. Paul said, "I have no one else like him." Timothy could have excused himself. He could have said, "I am not the one to stand, not me! I have got my health problems with my bad stomach." Paul had written to Timothy to take a little wine for his frequent stomach illness. Timothy was one who did not have a lot of physical strength. He had his physical problems. There are other scriptures that seem to indicate that Timothy had a reserved and timid personality. Timothy was willing to be the one. He was willing to be the trusted servant. He had a Jesus honoring Christian character, he was trusted and he exhibited genuine concern for others.

II) Christian Character means genuine concern for others. Vs 20

Verse 20 *I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.*

Timothy was genuinely interested in the affairs of others. Not in a meddling sense, but in a sense that he was really concerned about the welfare of others. Christian character means that we become interested about others with a genuine concern.

Timothy's concern for them did not develop over night. He knew the Philippians and loved them. He poured himself out for them and he developed this compassion of genuine Christian concern. We know that Timothy had a great spiritual heritage. His mother and his grandmother were faithful in teaching him the scripture. He had the apostle Paul as his mentor. So we learn that genuine Christian character does not develop instantly.

Illustration of Genuine Concern

Those of us who desire to grow in our need to find and learn from someone who we see demonstrates Christian character. If you know someone like that then do what you can to be around him or her. I found someone like that when I attended seminary. I met with a group at 7:00 AM every Tuesday. I committed myself to get to that prayer meeting every week. I went not only because it was a time of prayer. I could have stayed in my own room and prayed in the mornings. It was because I wanted to be around people who really exhibited Christian character.

The man who led that prayer meeting was Dr. Gray, a retired professor of Missions and he held what is called the "Chair of Fire." He was respected for being deeply spiritual and really intimate with Jesus Christ. I loved to pray with him because it was more than just taking our prayers to God, but it was also seeing a man demonstrate Christian character.

When one of the students came to the group asking for prayer and needed help, I saw Dr. Gray pull out his checkbook and write a check so that seminary student could travel to another city to receive the chemotherapy he needed when he did not have enough money to get to that city. It was that ability to demonstrate Christian character of genuine concern I observed in Dr. Gray.

If you know someone who demonstrates such a level of Christian character then do what you can to be around them. Find out about them and spend time with them because of the high level of Christian character displayed. Doing this is not looking to man, we still look to Christ, but Paul held Timothy up as an example. Often times we make an excuse. I don't really need to live my life with a high level of Christian character. People aren't supposed to be looking to me, we say, they are suppose to look to Christ. We reason and decide it does not matter how we live. That is a weak excuse because it does matter how we live.

Ultimately when men fail we still remember that it is Jesus Christ that is perfect not those who are our models. You need to remember that how you live your life is going to have a great impact on the ones you love most. If you are living your life with half commitment and poor Christian character then the people you love most are going to pick up on that and begin to model that.

When you do not truly live with commitment to Christ you not only are effecting yourself but you are hurting those you love most by providing them a model of half-hearted commitment to Christ. That is why it is important to live with integrity. That is why Paul held up Timothy. It is important that we truly have a compassion for others. Timothy is the one who would show genuine concern and meet the needs and interests of the Philippians. There was no one like him with that kind of concern.

It is no wonder that with the genuine concern that Timothy showed that two of Paul's pastoral epistles were for Timothy because of his genuine concern for others. Paul is giving Timothy advise in these epistles because he knows he will use this advise in his ministry of compassion. If you do not have genuine concern for others you do not have real Christian character. Timothy gives us the model of genuine concern for others. Timothy could be trusted. Timothy had genuine concern for others and timothy was dedicated in his service.

III) Christian Character means dedicated service. Vs 22

22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Timothy sought the things of Jesus Christ rather than his own interest. He helped Paul, he helped the interests of the Philippians and ultimately that was because of his deep commitment to Jesus Christ. When we serve others it should stem ultimately because of our commitment to Christ. Not only should our service be to meet the needs, but also one of the things Christ calls us to is service. When we meet the needs of others we are serving Jesus Christ. That is what we need to be about, having committed dedicated service for Jesus Christ.

Timothy served Paul faithfully as a son would serve his father. Lovingly he was faithful to Paul. Not because he looked up to Paul as some kind of lord. Timothy looked to Jesus Christ, but serving Paul was part of his service to Christ. Timothy had a significant role through out Paul's ministry. Later when Paul knew of his appending death it was Timothy that he would call. It was Timothy who showed dedicated service.

We need to commit ourselves to the service of Christ. There are two things people wrongly think regarding dedicated service. The first thing think is that thy are not worthy for service and they say, "I am not worthy enough for Christ's service." If you know whom God has called into his service through out history you know that is the same thing repeatedly said. You don't have to be talented you don't have to have high intellect you just have to be available to be used by God. You don't have to be strong physically. Timothy was weak physically. Timothy had his physical problems, but he was available to God. The key to service is availability.

The other thing that people wrongly think is that it all happens instantly. They think all of a sudden they will exhibit Christian character. We need to remember that was not the case for Timothy. He spent years with the apostle Paul. He had the longstanding tutoring of his mother and grandmother. Timothy was willing to exercise the discipline necessary to bring about Christian character. I heard of a weight loss program where all you do is play a taped message about losing weight while you sleep. Simply playing a tape is not going to bring about weight loss. We are in a society that wants everything instantly. Christian character is not going to come instantly. It needs to be developed and is going to take commitment.

Conclusion

Timothy is a great example to us who seem to be playing second fiddle in Christian service. The key to a great orchestra is not the lead instrument of the first chair. The key is in the second chair. What makes the difference is the musician that is behind the scene. If the orchestra has a committed second chair the whole orchestra is dedicated. Part of your Christian commitment is being able to serve behind the scenes. Some of us are called to be that second chair in the Christian life. Look at Timothy with all his character. He was willing to serve behind Paul. He wasn't interested in the credit. He was interested in serving Christ.

Are you willing to make the commitment needed to have Christian character? It will mean a submission to Jesus Christ. It will mean you surrender your will to the will of Christ. The first step is to put your faith in Christ. Then resolve in your heart that you will stand for Christ. In this day of great church attendance in America that makes such little difference, resolve in your heart that you will be the one to stand with impeccable Christian character. Follow the example of Timothy and decide to be one of the few who will really stand for Christ.

You may have never heard of Epaphroditus. He is only mentioned here in Philippians chapter 2 and then again briefly in Chapter 4. But Epaphroditus gives us a great example of Christian Commitment. We will be challenged to need a new level commitment.

Christian commitment

Philippians 2:25-30

As we face the coming days we are going to need a new level of Christian commitment. What we find in these verses of scripture is exactly that, an example of Christian commitment.

Illustration: Christian commitment

You have all heard Handel's Messiah and you love to hear the words to the Halleluiah chorus. Did you know when Handel began to compose that chorus he said, it was as though heaven were bursting in on to his mind. And for three weeks he withdrew himself, often times not eating. He did so to put his whole attention on composing this great chorus.

We sing this chorus and we hear this chorus sung, but we rarely if ever think about the Christian commitment that is behind the composing of the Halleluiah chorus. An example of Christian Commitment is what we find in our passage today. The example is of Epaphroditus.

You may never have heard of Epaphroditus. That is because he is only mentioned here in Philippians chapter 2 and then again briefly in Chapter 4. But Epaphroditus gives us a great example of Christian Commitment.

Read Philippians 2:25-30

25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Paul has been talking of self-sacrifice for the cause of Christ through this book of Philippians. He has been giving us different examples. He spoke about Christ, the ultimate example of commitment. Christ who humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. Paul uses himself as an example. The great Apostle Paul is an example of self-sacrificing commitment to the cause of Christ. He also used Timothy as an example, Paul's own disciple.

Now here is Epaphroditus, much less known than the other examples. It is refreshing to have someone held up as an example of Christian commitment who is not some kind of superstar. Paul has used Christ, and we acknowledge that Christ is the greatest example of all times in Christian commitment. Yet we ourselves know we can never measure up to Christ's example. Even Paul's example is so lofty and beyond what we could live up to.

So it is refreshing to have an example like Epaphroditus. Someone ordinary like we are. Yet he is a great example of Christian commitment because Epaphroditus was faithful. That is the key to commitment, faithful service to Jesus.

The Philippians had given Paul a great gift. They had raised a collection and sent it to the Apostle Paul at Rome. Paul is in a Roman prison. They needed someone to carry this gift to Paul. Epaphroditus is that man. He carried the gift to the Apostle Paul so he can continue his ministry there from the Roman prison. It was Epaphroditus the servant used to assist Paul in this way.

Epaphroditus through his great commitment is so concerned about the cause, that he works himself sacrificially to the point of death. He was so dedicated that exhaustion was about to take his life. Paul would send Timothy back in the future for the Philippians. At this point he is going to send back Epaphroditus. It is probably Epaphroditus who carried this letter back to the Philippian church to encourage them. So Paul had a great message and it had to be entrusted to a faithful servant and that servant was Epaphroditus.

Vs 25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

Paul had found Epaphroditus faithful and he gives him three great titles. He calls him his brother. His brother in Christ. Jesus had made it clear that all who come into the fellowship of Christ can call themselves brothers and sisters in Christ. We use that term. We call someone a brother or sister in Christ. Unfortunately we use the term brother when we forgot their name, but brother should exhibit the way we look at a person. The way we love a person in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. That is why Paul used the title, brother for Epaphroditus; he called him a brother, a brother in Christ.

Paul called Epaphroditus a fellow worker. Paul, this great worker himself, could call Epaphroditus a fellow worker. It was likely that the reason that Epaphroditus was to the point of death was because he was serving Paul in the Roman dungeon. It was a health risk to do the kind of exhausting work that it would require to carry the letter from Philippi to Rome and then serve Paul in prison. It would take great commitment to do this exhausting work. So Paul could call Epaphroditus his fellow worker because of the great work he had done.

He could call him a title that represented an even higher level of Christian Commitment. Paul could call Epaphroditus a fellow soldier in the cause of serving Christ. He could call Epaphroditus this because he was obedient like a soldier. Epaphroditus was trained and ready to serve. For Paul, also a great soldier of Jesus Christ, could call Epaphroditus a fellow soldier.

We are told in verse 27 how much Paul relied on this servant. If Epaphroditus would have died it would for Paul, have added sorrow upon sorrow. Paul expresses his sorrow here in the book of Philippians, the book of Joy. He had sorrow through his imprisonment and if Epaphroditus were to die it would have added more sorrow for him. That is because Epaphroditus was such a faithful servant.

Here was Epaphroditus, a man not gifted as a prophet, he did not write any books of the New Testament. There is nothing special mentioned about Epaphroditus. The only thing we know is that Epaphroditus was a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. It wasn't his title or position that brings out his special recognition here. It was only his faithful commitment to Jesus Christ.

Are wondering, what you can do to make a difference? You are an ordinary person. You say, I do not have any special titles, any special prestige what can I do? Look to Epaphroditus. There was nothing special about him. He was just one person committed to the cause of Christ and worked sacrificially for that cause. That is the great example. Paul says in Vs 29, "and honor men like him." We can look at Epaphroditus as an example of faithful commitment.

The work of Christ is carried on by the faithful few. The most common figure quoted is that eighty percent of the work of Christ is carried on by twenty percent of Christ's' followers. Those are the few who are really committed to the cause of Christ. Here was Epaphroditus one of those faithful few that

stands as an example to challenge us to rise to the occasion to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. I look at my own role as Pastor. I believe my first responsibility is to be a faithful servant. To stand in the example of Epaphroditus. But my next responsibility is to help those who will also stand commitment to Jesus Christ. To stay faithful even when the going is difficult.

You know Jesus was the greatest teacher of all times. He was the greatest leader. But even Jesus Christ saw the masses turn away from him. Jesus focused on a small group of disciples because that was his plan to train up a few dedicated Christian workers to turn this world upside down. Christianity has carried on by the few, not because of the masses. It goes on because of the faithful few that are really committed to the cause of Christ.

This is what we need today. That is the crying need of the hour. For more people to be faithful like that of Epaphroditus. What we don't need the masses that turned away from Christ. What we need are more with a true Christian commitment. Then we can go out as an army of God and reach this community with the message of the Gospel. Then people will look at us and see a clear example of what it means to be faithful and committed to the cause of Christ.

Vs 26: For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him.

Paul is speaking of the reason he was sending Epaphroditus to Philippi. He had been separated from his church in Philippi on a mission to serve the Apostle Paul. Through that dedicated service he became ill to the point of death. News of this reached Philippi that Epaphroditus was about to die. They were concerned that Epaphroditus may have already died. Epaphroditus became grieved because he knew his church was suffering over the news of his illness and that he may have died on his mission of love, which they sent him on.

So Epaphroditus wanted to return to them so that they would know things were all right with him. Then Epaphroditus wanted himself to get back to his church. He wanted to be faithful in the work he had but he missed his home church. Have you noticed that when those who are faithful in their church are the ones that miss it when they are away from it. They are actually homesick when away from their church home.

That is what was happening with Epaphroditus. He was homesick. He wanted to get back and be with his brothers and sisters in Christ. That was the reason that Paul was sending him back. Because they heard the news of his illness and because he was homesick for his home church family. The word used here distressed is the same word used in the gospel for distress when Jesus when he was praying at Gethsemane.

Epaphroditus was a dedicated servant and had become ill and when Paul sends him back it will relieve the distress. Paul wanted the people of Philippi to rejoice when they saw their faithful servant. When they see Epaphroditus it will take away their grief. For Paul, when Epaphroditus recovered from the illness it was described as mercy for him. Because if Epaphroditus had died it would have meant great sorrow for the Apostle Paul. So for Paul, the final reason for sending Epaphroditus back is that it would bring joy to the Philippians.

Paul wanted this fellowship to again experience the joy that they knew. That is the basic theme in the book of Philippians, joy. So Paul is sending back this servant so they would again have their burdens lifted and know the joy in Christ. Paul wrote the book of Philippians and he wanted no one to malign the character of Epaphroditus. He was going to send him home on this journey and he did not want anyone to think the Epaphroditus was a quitter. Paul wrote the letter to tell of the great character of Epaphroditus so that no one could say that he did not accomplish what he was commissioned to do. Epaphroditus was to be welcomed back as a hero on this return journey. He had been faithful.

We find out in verses 29-30 just how committed Epaphroditus was. It tells us he risked his own life. He laid his life on the line for service to Christ. Epaphroditus thought more about the needs of others than he did his own self-concerns. He served and performed the mission the church had sent him out to do. His service of Christ called him to risk his own life. It caused him to become ill to the point of death. It is no small matter to be attending to Paul in the needs he has in the Roman prison. You are putting your life on the line when you care for somebody that is about to be executed. We need people today who are willing to take risks. The gospel will not get to the difficult places unless people are willing to take risks.

There are some things in the Christian life that will take such commitment that we have to lay our very life on the line and trust God with that. That is what Epaphroditus did. It says he was risking his own life. The words mean he gambled with his life. He was willing to sacrifice his own life to be a dedicated servant of Jesus.

Illustration: Taking risks in Christian commitment

My wife and I have a friend named Nancy who has served as a missionary in Africa. When she was on her furlough we began to discuss with her about her plans. The mission board asked her if she would take a new assignment. This new assignment was to open up a work with a tribe of people that have never had the gospel.

There had been a foreign missionary there, but he died of disease. She was asked to take his place and to go into the difficult place. As she prayed about it she knew the risks involved. But she has gone there and served faithfully knowing that she is laying her life on the line. She was aware that she was gambling with her own life to serve Christ.

This is the example of Epaphroditus. He laid his life on the line. And you know our Lord was willing to lay his life on the line. This is the commitment, the call to sacrificial commitment in service to Jesus Christ. We need to serve in such a way that we, like Epaphroditus, would be willing to lay our lives on the line.

I have heard of a faithful servant who often said, it is better to burn out than to rust out. In other words he was willing to take a risk with his life to serve Christ. Some harm may come to his life when he serves Christ but this is better than sitting, doing nothing to serve Christ and rusting out.

How Christians need that message. The call to faithful service. So many Christians just sit and rust when they could be serving sacrificially. Yes it is costly. Yes, you risk your life. But we need those who will really serve Christ. Paul says hold such as these in high esteem. We need to thank God for those who really serve Christ in our midst. We have so many faithful. We need to call others to be faithful.

Epaphroditus stands before us as a great challenge. A challenge to a deeper commitment to Christ. The most important commitment you can make is the commitment to serve Jesus Christ faithfully. We have our example in Epaphroditus. Won't you commit to faithfully serve Jesus Christ?

Legalism: Our great enemy, Philippians 3:1-6

What is your aim as a Christian? The aim of a Christian is to, or should be to, please God. Every Christian should in his heart seek to please God. So as Christians we often ask that question. What can we do to please God? One person asked this question to a respected Christian institution. He phrased it this way.

What must I give up to please God? The response came from this Christian institution. First of all give up all colored clothes. Wear only white. My tie I am wearing would definitely be out. Everything that is not white get rid of from your wardrobe, they replied. Another thing to please God they said, stop sleeping on a soft pillow. That will only make you soft and how can you please God if you are sleeping on a soft pillow? Sell your musical instruments and have no entertainment.

Don't eat white bread anymore because it might bring you too much enjoyment. The last thing. Take no more warm baths only cold baths. These were the requirements laid out to please God. They came from a second century Christian institution. Popular Christian teachers have brought these examples to our attention as they have written in our day. We may not face this kind of bizarre legalism today. I have never heard anyone tell us that we must give up our colored clothes or soft pillows.

But still, we face the enemy of legalism in our day. In the second century it was not to sleep on soft pillows and to give up colored clothes. Paul faced legalism in the first century. The Judiasers wanted the Christians to do certain things. They tried to add good works on top of God's abundant grace. So, legalism is nothing new and it is still with us today.

Let's read Philippians Chapter 3:1-6. Paul writes these words to the church at Philippi that he loved. It was a church dear to his heart. He warns them of the enemy of legalism.

Paul Says: Phil 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

Paul has been writing to the Philippian church, warning them about internal controversies that could divide them. Warning them to caution from a self centered perspective that could ruin their Christian life, but now beginning here in chapter 3, Paul turns the attention of the church in Philippi away from the internal controversies and their own self centeredness and tells them to watch out for those on the outside of the church trying to inject legalistic qualifications on the church.

Now here is a different warning coming from outside. He is warning of legalism that Paul knows could destroy the church. This young church could be deceived into thinking they were still under the obligation to follow the Old Testament law. Paul makes it clear that Christianity is a religion of grace. It is a religion based on undeserved favor. It is not a system of the law. In our day and age we need to hear that again, that Christianity is a religion of grace.

Just recently I read a book that I would recommend to you, *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll. He calls the Christian church to a new awakening to that idea of grace. To put aside the legalistic bondage and the idea of salvation through works. We should realize that what we have as Christians is all

undeserved favor from God. Paul attacks this enemy of legalism. His first great weapon to attack legalism is that of joy.

Look at verse one: Phil 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! Joy should be a major part of every Christian believer. It is a theme in the book of Philippians. Sixteen times there is reference to rejoicing or joy in the book of Philippians. Joy is a part of the Christian life. Paul himself is rejoicing, even though he is in prison. Even though he does not know the outcome of his imprisonment. He may face death, but Paul rejoices. He writes a book of joy in the midst of all this. Paul is warning the Philippians against legalism and he does so by exhorting them to be joyous. We overcome legalism with joy.

Here we find a command of joy. Paul is not saying that joy is an option in the Christian life. If you are a Christian then you should live a life of joy. We should rejoice regardless of the circumstances. Even when it is difficult the Christian life is a life of joy. Jesus taught that we should have joy. Even those who are persecuted should have joy, he said. The Bible tells Christians to be full of joy. Jesus said that the Christian life is to experience a joy that no one can take away.

We have a responsibility to have a joy in our lives that others may see. It is joy that enables us to face the real hardships in life when they come upon us. It is joy that helps us to take the everyday inconveniences in our lives with an attitude that pleases God. It is interesting how Paul begins chapter 3. It begins with the word finally. Right in the middle of the book Paul says, finally. It is kind of like those who preach. Some say lastly and last. Some say finally and finish.

Here is Paul saying finally and lasting. It is practically the middle word of the book. It is not so much that Paul says finally, like it is his last point. But Paul is saying furthermore, let me proceed on. Let me go on from the truth I have been giving you and tell you more truths. Paul is taking on legalism and he uses joy as a weapon. There are those who might tell us that in the Christian life that we do not need joy. But the Bible tells us that in the Christian life we overcome legalism with joy. The Christian life should be a life of rejoicing. Joy is mentioned in the Bible as one of the fruits of the spirit.

When we are really in tune with God, walking by the Spirit in Christ, we will exhibit joy in our life. Of all people it is Christians who should be rejoicing. Because we have been saved and we know our future is in heaven with God. We are the ones with a confidence in Christ who should exhibit joy. Your weapon should be joy against legalism. Legalists will do their best to replace grace, the free gift of God with a works oriented philosophy.

Joy is our offensive weapon that we use to attack anything that seeks to take away our freedom in Christ.

But Paul does more than to talk about joy, our weapon of offence. He gives a defensive strategy by telling us to watch out, beware of those who would teach works. Beware of those who are legalists. Paul puts it this way, "beware of the dogs".

Paul says that there are those out there that want to instill legalistic rules and regulations in place of the freedom of Christ. Paul says, watch out for those dogs. When Paul says watch out for the dogs, he is not talking about some friendly puppy that frolics around. He is talking about savage beasts that lived outside the city and scavenged for food. They could be dangerous. This is what he warns us against.

Illustration

My hobby it is bicycle riding. I figure in the last ten years I have rode my bicycle the equivalent of New York City to Los Angeles ten times across. You can believe me when I tell you I have encountered dogs. Even when I was riding in our area I encountered a pack of dogs wanting to come at me. They seemed to be serious about the whole thing. Usually I take my water bottle to spray them away, but this time I used my bicycle pump for full defense from these dogs snapping at my heels. But I got by them.

When I got by them I looked up and realized the paved road ended. I had to make a decision. Would I go on by gravel road or turn around and face the dogs. Paul saying that to encounter legalists is to encounter these kinds of dogs. They will snap at you and tear at you if they get the chance. They are dangerous. Paul likened those who spread legalism with a pack of vicious dogs. He says beware of these dogs. Paul is referring here to the Judiasers. These were Jewish Christians who would say that becoming a Christian was not enough. First you must become a Jew and obey all the rules and regulations of the Jewish religion, which means circumcision among other things. Then and only then could you become a Christian. Paul said no. That is not the way it is.

We approach God on the basis of undeserved favor. We never do any works for God that justifies us in his sight. Even our good works are as filthy rags before God. We only approach God because God is gracious. Because God is all-merciful. Only when we put our faith in Jesus Christ do we dare consider ourselves righteous before God. Paul says these Judiasers are dogs. They are evil workers. Paul went so far as to call them, mutilators of the flesh. In light of the grace of Christ there is no value for circumcision spiritually.

Paul says those requiring circumcision were mutilators of the flesh. It brings to mind the picture of Elijah on Mt Carmel with the priests of Baal, who mutilated their own flesh to try to get the attention of their gods. Paul is saying that is all the value that your works have. If you are trying to please God through good works Paul says, no. It is only by grace. Paul says a true circumcision of the Christian is that which happens inward in the life of the believer of the heart, by the Spirit of God. As Christians we worship by the Spirit of God.

We put no confidence in the flesh. It is not so much a matter of what you don't do. Those who don't wear colored clothes, those who don't watch television or those who don't dance or don't do this or that. If it were a matter of what we did not do then the most spiritual ones would be in the cemetery. The dead don't do any of those things. It is more than what we don't do. It is what we do.

Paul says it in verse 3 it is what we do, "We worship by the Spirit of God in Christ Jesus." Paul is going to share with us here something about his own personal life. He is going to give his testimony. What he was like before he knew Christ and how he came to know Christ and what his life was like after he knew Christ. Paul was not one to boast. He did not go from church to church to tell how bad he was and how good he became. But he knew at this time it was needed to tell people where he had been. Because it was going to make a difference in how he ministered to the people in Philippi. He wanted them to know that he was not preaching grace just because he had never tried trusting in the flesh. He wanted them to know that if anyone trusted in the flesh he had.

But it was all meaningless to Paul when he came to know Jesus Christ there on that Damascus road. For Paul all he had done in the past meant nothing compared to the riches of knowing Jesus Christ as his savior. So Paul tells us of his past. He tells us how he had put confidence in the flesh.

To those who were preaching circumcision he said let me say this, I was "circumcised on the eighth day." It was something probably many of the Judiasers themselves could not claim. Paul said as for Jewish heritage, you find no finer Jewish heritage, he was a descendent of Abraham, of Isaac a descendent of Jacob and he was even of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul was from the tribe that King David was from.

Not many of the Judiasers could claim the heritage of Paul. As far as religion and the observation of the Mosaic Law Paul rose above all of them. He was under one of the great religious teachers of the day, Gamaliel mentioned in Acts 22:3. Paul knew the greatest of teachings and practices. He was so zealous that he persecuted the Christians.

He was heartily in favor when Christians were stoned to death and as a Jew that was showing the zeal he had for his religion. He was more righteous than all those who criticized him yet with all this, it meant

nothing. The only thing that counted for Paul was his relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul attacked all those who wanted to add works to Christianity.

He made the same cry as those made later at the reformation. It is by grace alone that we are justified through faith. Christianity is so simple, so beautiful and it is a shame that people cannot accept God's plan of salvation. It is a shame that they must try to add to what God has provided. Some people say that to become a Christian you must stop doing all the things that you like to do and start doing all those things that you thought were miserable. Paul says that is not Christianity. The life in Christ is joy. It is undeserved favor in Jesus Christ. Legalism is our enemy.

We overcome it with joy. We experience freedom in Christ. When I took a trip to the holy Land we saw one holy site after another and each site had a cathedral. We went by something that was not on our scheduled tour at all. It was a little Baptist church in Nazareth. We told our tour guide to stop. We were growing tired of seeing "holy sites" that were empty spiritually. We stopped at that little church and the pastor invited us all in the church. He was going to tell us how he came to know Christ as his savior.

He said he had such a hunger to know God that it was burning inside him. So he went to a church and asked them to help him find God. He said they took out a statue of Jesus and they said, "Start praying to this statue to begin your process of salvation." He was miserable as he applied this bad advice. Miraculously God broke through. Somehow he realized that he did not earn his righteousness.

It was not be his effort but that he only had to accept what God had already done by allowing his son Jesus to die on the cross. That is what the cross means. The Jesus death on the cross has paid the penalty for your sins. All we have to do is accept that. All we have to do is put our faith in Jesus Christ. No longer trusting in our own works and deeds, but turning our lives over completely to Jesus Christ.

Confidence in Christ, Philippians 3:7-11

The Power of Christ meant for Paul a confidence. For the believer the resurrection is a certain fact. It gives us confidence. This confidence in Christ is for all Christians. Not just a few, but all are meant to have this abundant power.

Confidence in Christ Philippians 3:7-11

Just imagine something with me today. Let's say that a few years ago that you went out and for a nickel a share bought fifty thousand shares of stock in a company that no one really thought would do any good. Some company they called the cellular phone company. And all of a sudden that stock that you thought would probably amount to nothing was now selling for sixty dollars a share. All of a sudden you are wealthy, you are a multi-millionaire.

Let's imagine something else. You have worked hard toward your goal and are about to finish your accomplishment. You are about to be awarded a PhD degree from Harvard University. The research that you did gave you recognition internationally.

If you can't picture yourself in any of those scenarios, then maybe you can picture yourself in this, you get a call from the Olympic committee and they need you to go and participate in the Olympics. It turns out that in the Olympics you win several gold medals. All of a sudden your face is on cereal boxes across the country.

What do these things have in common, this wealth, the prestige and the fame? What is the common denominator that ties these things together? In this passage of scripture Paul would take all these things and say that they have one thing in common. Compared to knowing Christ each of these things is valueless. All their worth, in comparison to knowing Christ, is to take them and throw them out onto the garbage heap.

We say we have a landfill crises. Our landfills are becoming full. But we have a different kind of crises than we think. Actually it is that the wrong things are being thrown into the landfill. Instead of old bottles and coffee grinds we need to be taking all the things that are valuable, but keep us from Christ and throw them away. Paul says the only thing that really counts is knowing Christ. Anything else that might keep us from knowing Christ needs to get thrown out.

Look at what Paul says in Philippians 3:7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

Now in verse 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

For Paul, all the things that he had been talking about in these chapters, all the prestige he had from studying under the greatest of scholars, all the fame that came from his being zealous. All the important heritage he had. All those were of no use except to be thrown out. He considered none of this to his profit. Paul emphasis was that the former things in his life are now a loss. Paul had all the things that others sought after. However he summed them all up and said they were all valueless. To Paul all that he had before knowing Christ was wasted self righteousness. In some ways I can identify with the Apostle Paul.

I can look back on my life and see my life formed into two distinct categories. First of all there was twenty years that I went on with life not knowing Christ. Then came the years of knowing Christ. If I had

a thousand lifetimes of living without Christ, none of it could equal even a few years of knowing Jesus Christ.

Paul had a dramatic experience on the Damascus road. He had an encounter with Jesus Christ and it changed everything for him. It changed his whole outlook. Now he looked back on his life and all the things he thought were to his credit. All the things he thought were his accomplishments. He looks back and says now they have no value.

Is there something in your life that is keeping you from Jesus Christ? There is tragedy that scripture portrays in the rich young ruler. He wanted to come to Christ and be a follower. But he would not let go of his riches. He was not prepared to give everything to follow Jesus. Oh, if he only knew all the gain. If he only knew the abundance he would have in his life if he just let go and counted the former things as loss. What he would know in his own lifetime. That is why sometimes tragedy can accomplish a very important work in our lives.

I shared with some of you that our mission pastor was not in the pulpit last Sunday. He was in Houston because his sister in law was in critical condition. She was near death. Through this tragedy our mission pastor shared the gospel and his sister in law and she and her husband committed their life to Jesus Christ. It took tragedy to let go of everything and come to realize that the only thing that can really count is value in this life is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

That is why when someone loses a job or has a serious health problem, if that causes them to have an encounter with Jesus Christ it actually becomes to their profit. We face in this country a recession. There are problems and people are losing their jobs and that is tragic. But as a church we should look for opportunities. We need to find those people who are experiencing loss in their lives. Who now have nothing to hang on to from what was formerly important to them. We need to tell them Jesus Christ is your answer. Jesus Christ in your hope. We need to tell them to put their confidence in Christ.

When you look back on in your life, what do you consider your greatest assets, your home, your car, your health? If these things keep you from Jesus Christ they have become a liability. Only when you know Jesus Christ do you truly know the abundance that God has planned for your life. That is why Paul when he came face to face with Christ put all those things behind him and counted the former things as valueless.

The more you have achieved, the more you are a self made person the more difficult submission to Christ will be for you. Paul's decision, give up all personal advantages for the sake of Christ. Nothing else is important. Nothing else is worth you putting your time and energies into except for Jesus Christ and his cause. A missionary paraphrased scripture when he said; he is no fool to give up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

If we did what Paul said and threw out on the garbage heap all the things that you count as important. In today's terms we may take all our accomplishments and give them words like trash, dirty muck, garbage. They are all Yuk because they keep me from a proper relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul's cry from this passage of scripture is to renounce your pride and renounce everything that you are proud of and seek Christ alone.

I once knew a principal of a high school. One of his geography teachers was a Christian. The principal himself was a Christian. This principal could not understand what got into this geography teacher. He made a teaching tool for his students that was wonderful. It was the talk of the whole school. But the principal was confused because after the semester was over instead putting that geography display into storage so he could use it again he destroyed it. It was beautiful and he could have saved it and reused it for years. The principal could not understand why he destroyed it.

The geography teacher said, “Because of the pride that the project created in my life I just had to destroy it.” That is what Paul is talking about. Being ready to get rid of anything that cause pride and keeps you from your relationship with Jesus. To be willing to throw those things out. Paul talks about true righteousness in verse 9.

True righteousness does not come through our own self efforts but comes through faith. Look at verse 9.

That I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Paul experienced true righteousness when he encountered Jesus Christ. When he put his faith in Jesus, then Paul knew righteousness. All that he did before, all that he tried to follow the law were of no credit. Only when he put his faith in Jesus Christ did he know righteousness. Now he knew righteousness. There is only one righteous, Jesus. Our righteousness comes only through Christ. It is grace. It is a free gift and it comes when we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul makes the comparison here. He talks about legalistic righteousness and trying to become righteous by following the law and he talks about faith in Jesus Christ. The one, righteousness by the law is worthless. Righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ has ultimate worth! Because it is the only real righteousness. Paul is not so much making a comparison as he is saying there is no comparison.

Trying to compare your own efforts toward righteousness to faith in Christ is no real comparison at all. Paul says there are two kinds of people in this world, first there those in Adam who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Then there are those who are in Christ. Who have put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. The crucial question is; have you put your faith in Christ? Do you know this kind of righteousness that is through Christ?

So many people are walking around with a false idea. If you were to ask them if they are a Christian they stop and hesitate and say, I believe I am a Christian. If you would ask them why they would say, well I have been a pretty good person. I have tried to do what’s right, mind you I am not perfect but I have done my best.

The scripture tells us that our own good works will never measure up to God’s standards. It is only faith through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only one who has walked this earth with this righteousness. He is the only one who said, I am the way the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but through me.

Our own works will never enable us to reach God. It is only when we humble ourselves, put our accomplishments aside and put our faith in Jesus Christ do we experience a true righteousness. All of us need to examine our lives and ask are we in Christ? Have I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Have I put my confidence in Christ? Am I experiencing the relationship with God he intends for me?

Christians should never be satisfied with salvation in Christ. But there is also a process in becoming more like Jesus Christ. If Paul could not attain his righteousness from the law then who of us could have enough good works to make us righteous before God? If anyone followed the law it was the Apostle Paul. Paul realized that all his striving to be good was worthless. It is only through Jesus Christ that true righteousness comes.

Paul talks about righteousness through faith and he goes on to talk about something else that we have in the Christian life. That is a power. We have a power in Jesus Christ Paul says in verses 10-11.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul wanted the very power that was involved in raising Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul says that power is available to Christians. We can live by this power in our daily life. His desire was to know Christ completely. Not just as his savior but as his daily power.

Righteousness comes because Christ died on the cross, but there is the power of the resurrection available to believers. The very power that raised Jesus from the cross is available. Do you know this power in your life? Are you experiencing personally the power that raised Jesus from the cross? This is a power for victory. It is a power for victory over sin. It is also a power to have a bold confidence in our faith.

When George Truett was preaching to a group of college students and talking to the seniors. This entire group had become a believer in Christ except one student. This one student was a skeptic and a doubter. Through the series of meetings he listened about Christ, but he did not respond.

Finally he came to George Truett and he said I just want to know one thing, is Jesus Christ real to you. He said do you know with your whole heart and all your being that Jesus Christ is real and helps you? What would you say if someone came up to you and asked you this? Is Jesus Christ real to you? Do you know with your whole heart and whole being that Jesus Christ is real?

What would you say? How would you respond? George Truett said, son I do not know many things, but this one thing I do know, I know with all my heart that Jesus is real. When everyone else has failed me Jesus Christ is real and helps me. That is confidence in Christ. That is the power of the resurrection working in the life of a believer.

That young man put his faith in Jesus Christ. The power of the resurrection works through the believer and touches lives of those who we come in contact with. We need to make Jesus the power in our lives. The power to have victory in the areas where we struggle.

This confidence in Christ is for all Christians. Not just a few, but all are meant to have this abundant power. The power of Christ gave the apostle Paul a boldness. Such boldness that he could write these very words. Jesus came because he wanted us to have a full and meaningful life. He offered us the power that worked to raise him from the cross.

The Power of Christ meant for Paul a confidence. For the believer the resurrection is a certain fact. It gives us confidence. We have the confidence in Christ that when this life comes to an end we ourselves will be raised to live forever with God in heaven. Experiencing the power of Christ is our confidence in Christ.

PRESS ON IN CHRIST, Philippians 3:12-16

One of the greatest Christian classics, maybe the greatest of all is John Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress. It is an allegory written by a Baptist Pastor who wrote while he was imprisoned for his faith. It gives us an analogy of the Christian life.

Pilgrims Progress is the story of a man named Christian, led yonder through the wicket gate, who begins a pilgrimage where he encounters all kinds of opposition. He encounters different personalities like Moneylove, Envy and Ignorance and Talk. It is such a great classic because we can identify with these problems.

In our Christian life we are on a pilgrimage. We will come across all these difficulties. There is a problem for how some people take this analogy. They come into difficulty, struggling with the idea of Christianity and whether they want to make their commitment to Christ and all these temptations come to them and finally they make their commitment to Christ. Somehow they have gotten confused. They think now their pilgrimage is over and they have finally reached the Celestial city. That is not the way the Bible portrays our Christian pilgrimage.

The Bible talks about the Christian life as a pilgrimage. When you become a Christian you have only begun the pilgrimage. Once you become a Christian, then you are called to press on in Christ toward the great goal of becoming like Jesus.

There may be a struggle in coming to Christ, but no one should consider that when they become a Christian they have arrived. No, the journey has just begun. There is a saying; Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven. That saying may be true, but it is not an excuse for a sinful lifestyle.

We recognize that nobody has arrived and Christians are not perfect. We are on a journey to become more like Jesus Christ. Christian maturity does not come instantly. That is why there are many, like those in the current discipleship class, who discipline themselves and work hours weekly in Bible study, prayer, improving relationships and in scripture memorization. Because Christian maturity is a process and requires discipline, to become more like Jesus Christ.

Some people believe that you can have some experience in your life and all of a sudden you have arrived, you're perfect. That is not the way our Christian life is pictured in the Bible. In this passage we have a call to press on. There is a warning that no one has arrived. We never reach a level of moral perfection in this life. That will happen when we are with the Lord in heaven.

It could be summed up by the old Negro Spiritual song. "Please be patient with me. God is not through with me yet." It is a journey. It is a goal. The first goal that we see is that we must press on. Look at verse 12.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

This is the Apostle Paul speaking. He is saying, "I have not yet arrived. I have not yet obtained all these things." So we know that nobody in the Christian life has arrived. Not the Pastor, not the deacon, not Billy Graham. No one has arrived. We are all called in this journey to press on.

Here is Paul talking about his own life. He had a dramatic experience. He had encountered Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. His testimony was probably more dramatic than any of us, yet he had not arrived. He was just called to a pilgrimage of becoming more like Jesus Christ. Paul was not satisfied only with having this encounter with Jesus Christ. For Paul that was only the beginning. That was only the start of becoming more like Jesus.

Spiritual growth requires an ongoing lifetime commitment. Paul wrote this instruction because there were members of the church at Philippi who thought they had arrived. They thought that everything was where it needed to be in their life and they did not realize they need to continually press on in Christ.

For Paul, the main purpose of his life was to press on in Jesus Christ. For him everything related to the goal of being more like Christ. We need to remember this when we get discouraged and when we wonder if it is worth it to press on. We have troubles and our world seems to cave in. Is it all worth it? The answer is yes.

Those are the times we are called to press on. We are to be more like Christ and continue to look ahead to the finish line. Paul wants to make this point so clear. He does this through an illustration. He talks about the imagery of the games. He talks about one who is running a race. The race could only be won when the runner gives the race his full attention.

That is what we find in the story of the tortoise and the hare. Here is one who can run fast, but if distracted they will not win the race. Paul says, Run in such a way that you may win. Press on that you have your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ and the goal of becoming more like him.

Recently I read the biography of one of the great Christian Missionaries of all times, William Carey. He said that if there is only one thing that he wanted to be remembered for, it was that he was nothing special. He had no special intelligence, but when people wondered how he and his team of two others translated the Scriptures into forty languages it wasn't because they were greatly gifted. He said it was because they were ones who could press on.

He called himself a plodder who was one who continually had the goal of becoming more like Christ. That is what we are called to in the Christian life. We all need to know that God has called us for a purpose and we only realize our purpose when we keep our eyes fixed on Christ and press on.

We need to become plodders and press on. We need to keep our eternal perspective. To grow in Christ will require commitment. It is going to mean commitment to Bible Study. It is going to mean service in the local church. Pressing on in Christ will require a commitment to prayer. It requires discipline to grow spiritually.

When they ran the race in those ancient games they would take the victor's prize of a wreath and put it at the finish line. So for those who were running the race, they could see the prize before them. It would motivate them to run in a way in which they might win.

The goal of becoming more like Jesus Christ is before us. We see Jesus Christ and his life in the Scriptures. We have this goal before us of becoming more like Jesus, for Paul, that was his great all consuming goal.

If our goal is to be more like Jesus Christ, then how can we reach that goal? The answer is verse 13. It will require a commitment to single mindedness.

13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

Paul said there are many things, but this one I do. I strain forward in the race, the pilgrimage of becoming more like Jesus Christ. He said I forget what is behind and strain forward for what is ahead. Paul's reminder is clear. You have not arrived in your Christian life and you need to continue in your spiritual disciplines in your life.

We need to forget the past. Paul had a past where he persecuted Christians. He was in hearty agreement when Christians were put to death. He could have allowed himself to become paralyzed because of sorrow and grief over his past. But Paul says those things of the past I put behind me. I forget about what is behind.

So many Christians have wasted much of their lives thinking if only they had been faithful things might be different. The call of Scripture is to put that behind and to take today for what it is. To say from this moment on I am going to be straining forward in the race of becoming more like Jesus Christ. Forget what is behind and has been wasted. Also we need to forget, in a sense, the great victories that we have had. Those victories might tempt us to think we can coast along in our Christian life.

We had this experience with God that is dramatic. We have seen people come to the Lord. We have taught Sunday school where the class members have gone on to have great and mighty ministries. All these things and we could tell ourselves, now it is time for me to rest. Now it is time for me to sit back and let others get involved. Look at verse 14.

14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

We may retire from a job or even from vocational ministry, but as Christians we never retire from pressing on to be more like Christ. Whether you are young or a senior adult the call is the same, press on in Christ.

Could you imagine if an athletic team would rest in their past? They had won the great championship last year. This year they have decided not to practice. They will just go into every contest and tell the opposing team, we were the champions last year, so we are just going to walk in here and expect to win. They would never last as champions. If they are to continue to stay champions it will require they continue to discipline themselves and to get better.

In the Christian life there is a call to continued discipline. To continue to press on. We need to be single minded about this. We need to learn not to be distracted by so many things all around us. We need to single mindedly keep our focus on the really important things. The things that really matter, the eternal things

We can become distracted and look away from the goal of becoming like Christ. If you saw the movie Chariots of Fire, then maybe you remember the great runner Abraham. He had won so many races. His coach held up such discipline. But he finally lost one of the races because he looked to the side. Just as he was about to finish the race he looked to see where the competitor was. His coach said to him, that look cost you the race. He was not single minded on the finish and the prize that lay ahead.

That is similar to what Paul is calling our attention to here. He is calling us to be single minded toward the goal of becoming like Christ. Yes there are many things that are good. But there is only one thing that is really best. Those are the things that count for eternity. We make our lives more like Jesus.

When we are running the race it is not time to stop and check our watch, tie our shoes or listen to the cheering crowd. When we are in a race it is time for us to be single minded and press on.

We need to keep our focus on things that really matter. Did you know that God has a purpose for you life? God has put you on this earth for a reason. He has a purpose that he has only for you. God has something exciting in store for you, but you must trust him. You must continue to press on. To do this we must develop a spiritual maturity. Look at verses 15-16.

15 All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

In our salvation we have been called in Christ. Now we must live up to that calling and develop a spiritual maturity. We must press on in single minded service to Christ. Spiritual maturity is not instant. There are times when we call for immediate decision. We ask people to commit their lives to Christ on the spot. We never make a call to instantly receive spiritual maturity. This comes by a process. It is a pilgrimage. It is an ongoing commitment to Jesus Christ.

We obtain salvation but we continue to seek spiritual maturity. We must recognize that we need to press on. We begin to reach the mark of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is not looking for shortcuts. Spiritual maturity is committing to the Christian life for the long term. To look to Christ in the good times and hard times and to press on. That is what the call is. God's purpose for you will mean keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus.

We should have that goal that Paul had to become like Christ. We have the same call to press on. Maturity is being teachable and being willing to listen to what God has to say to us. It does not matter if you have been a Christian for forty years or for just forty days. The key to spiritual maturity is being teachable before God. Be willing to move on, to press on to grow in Christ. It will mean forgetting what is behind and straining to what is ahead. To become like Christ.

It is a matter of priorities. It is a matter of finding out what is really important in your life and going after it. Spiritual maturity is a growth process, so we need to be willing to press on. Are you willing to press on? Are you willing to be single minded in becoming like Christ? You must press on in Christ.

Your Heavenly Citizenship, Philippians 3:17-21

How much value do you place on your citizenship? We have several here who may be citizens of different countries. We have Canadians here. We have US citizens and Mexican citizens here. You have a citizenship in some nation. How much do you value or think about your citizenship?

We rarely think about our citizenship, but for those who enter this country as foreigners, they think much about what citizenship means. It is so costly for them to gain their citizenship. They are surprised when we take our citizenship for granted. There are so many rights and privileges that come with our citizenship.

There was a citizen of the United Kingdom that ended up in jail in another country. His country made an appeal to let their citizen go free from prison. The nation refused to let the citizen go so they rounded up ten thousand troops sent them overseas. They marched over difficult terrain went in and did battle and rescued their citizen and carried him back. That is an extreme example of the privileges of being a citizen.

Did you know that we have a citizenship that is greater than any national citizenship? The Bible says those who put their faith in Christ have a heavenly citizenship. That is what Paul is speaking about in these verses. He wants you to know that as a Christian you have a dual citizenship. You may live on earth and have a national citizenship, but you also have a citizenship which is in heaven.

Read: Philippians 3:17-21

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

This world ultimately is not your home. You are only visiting here. Your true home and your true citizenship is in heaven. That is what Paul is talking about in this passage of Scripture. There are two areas that go along with citizenship. There are certain rights and privileges that go along with citizenship but citizenship also means responsibilities. Do you know that you have responsibilities as a citizen? If you do not know that you will find out if you do not pay your taxes. You have a responsibility as a citizen to file your income tax. There are responsibilities that go along with citizenship.

You have privileges and responsibilities. Paul is talking about our rights and privileges as heavenly citizens but also responsibilities of heavenly citizenship. There are certain responsibilities in living as heavenly citizens.

The first thing Paul does is use his own life as an example. Look at 3:17 “17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” Paul deals with the responsibility that comes with being a heavenly citizen. Some thought because they were

Christians and experienced the grace of God that they were without responsibilities and moral obligations. They abused their freedom in Christ and abused their heavenly citizenship. Some thought that heavenly citizenship gave them a passport to sin.

Paul says follow my example. He is not living a life free of moral responsibilities. He said live according to the example of the life I live before you. Paul had been talking previously to those who were legalists, who wanted Christians to follow every letter of the Old Testament law. They wanted gentiles to first become a Jew and then only become a Christian. Paul had to deal with that and he had preached freedom in Christ. He had dealt with one extreme of those who were legal about Christianity. They would force others into their mold.

But when we preach freedom in Christ there is a danger. People are going to misunderstand their freedom in Christ and think they can do whatever they want regardless of what the Word of God says. So Paul is dealing with those on the other side who have taken their liberties and abused them as a license for sin. Paul has to deal with those on both sides. He is in the middle pulling each side in. He has those who want to go in the direction of legalism and those who want to use their freedom as a license to sin. Paul is in the middle pulling back both extremes. Neither extreme is healthy. Paul says look at my example for keeping the balance.

How would it be that, after preaching the message I go home and get a call on the telephone and someone said, what the Bible says I feel challenged to apply to my life. Then I responded that I am glad you are challenged by what I preach, but I myself had no intention of doing any of the things that I preached about. This would be a do as a say not as I do approach. If we only speak words they make very little impact. They need to be followed by lifestyle that matches our words. That is what will make an impact. We need to not only preach the Word of God, but to live the Word of God by the example of our lives. That is what will make a real impact.

Paul is able to say live the way I live. Paul says; Look at me as your example. We live in a day where people lift up Christian leaders to an unhealthy extreme. Paul is not talking about that. He is talking about in a healthy way; find an example to encourage you in your faith. Paul is saying look to those leading a life that are an example of Christ and learn from them. Really he is saying even more than that. He is saying let your life be an example so others can look to you for a good example of living in Christ.

Paul even encouraged Timothy as a young man to be an example to the older ones. So whoever you are and where you are in your Christian faith, if it be many years of pilgrimage or a young person just beginning the Christian walk you have a responsibility to be an example and you may find encouragement by looking to others. Find someone who really lives their life as an example of Christ. Some people refer to this as finding a mentor. I know in my own life I can think of several individuals who have had a great impact on me. It was because of their example made an impact on me.

I remember once I was doing my laundry at the laundry mat and I looked out and saw one of the men I looked to as an example in the parking lot. A man who led great spiritual awakening conferences and was associated with revival. He had been an example to me. I remember seeing him pushing his shopping cart out to his car. I thought to myself I wonder if this great man of prayer will leave his cart out in the parking lot or will he return the cart to the designated area. The sign asks you to return the cart, but would he really do it. I watched him push his cart to the designated area. Now when I go shopping I can't help but search for the designated area and return my cart. It was partly because this man set an example even in the small details and apparently when no one was looking.

Paul is saying I am holding myself up as an example. He was risking people misunderstanding this as conceit. He had already made it clear that he had not arrived. He was making a point that we need to look to examples in the Christian life. Paul wants us to have that example. It is such a blessing that we have those examples here. You can look to your Sunday school teacher and find an example. We are blessed in

our church to have deacons and staff that set godly examples. That is a true blessing for us to have men and women who stand as an example. In our church all you have to do is look around and you will find your example for living the Christian faith.

Paul talks about those who are heavenly citizen, but who live with worldly purposes. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

This letter brought to the Philippian church by Epaphroditus was stained by the tears. Paul is broken hearted and weeping because those who claim to be heavenly citizens are focused on the things of the world. It has moved Paul to tears. Those who claim to be heavenly citizens yet live like the world bring about heartache and sorrow. That is the danger of preaching liberty and grace. People will abuse their privileges and live like the world. Those who became worldly and broke Paul's heart may have been distorting Paul's own teaching. Here Paul is not weeping over the lost, he is weeping over those who have made a commitment to Christ and have forsaken their heavenly citizenship.

Paul uses strong words and called these people enemies of the cross. Their god is their stomach. In other words what they really worship is their own appetites of the flesh. They seek their own selfish interests the very thing that should be their shame.

In the Hymn we sing, turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in his wonderful grace and the things of the world will grow strangely dim. Here the whole thing has been reversed. Paul is weeping over those who have turned their eyes on the world and the things of Christ have grown dim. When you focus on the world you lose interest of spiritual things.

There are people who have no interest in fellowship of believers, the Word of God or prayer. What then do they have an interest for? You will find they have an interest in the things of the world. That is why the spiritual things have grown cold for them. We need to put our focus on the things of Christ and make sure we live consistently with our heavenly citizenship.

Paul is calling the Philippians to this heavenly citizenship. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, We need to make sure we live consistent to our heavenly citizenship. If you are a Christian then you have a citizenship in heaven. You not only carry your national passport but you have an invisible passport of heaven. You have certain rights and privileges with this citizenship. You can claim heavenly privileges. Look at verse 21

The Lord Jesus Christ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Part of your heavenly citizenship is that you will receive a glories transformed body. Our citizenship means we have the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have power for victory over sin. God has given us the privilege of communicating with him intimately as part of our citizenship. He has given us the privilege of taking the gospel to others. We have all this, but we need to be heavenly minded. We need to put our focus on spiritual things. When we have this spiritual focus the world grows dim. We desire Christ more. We have a hunger for the Word of God and prayer. Then we are living consistent with our heavenly citizenship.

Resolving Church Conflict, Philippians 4:1-3



What does an argument that took place 2000 years ago between two ladies have to do with the church today? We will find out plenty.

A few years ago I was talking to a minister that told me the story of his church. He said that at one time the place where the church is located was very heavily populated. It went through a period of depopulation. There were two churches in the area but as people left neither church could afford a full time pastor. So they did what seemed logical to them, they decided to form together as one congregation to hire a full time minister.

A problem arose from that amalgamation. Now this one congregation had two facilities. The decision on where to meet was an easy one for them. Just meet in the facility where they always had been meeting. The problem was though; both groups had the same idea. A conflict emerged. It was impassible. Then a solution came. They would keep both facilities even though they did not need both. One week they would meet in one facility and the next week the other.

This decision to meet in alternate places took place about 40 years earlier. But this pastor noticed something. Some from each facility would only attend church when it was held in their own facility. There was a grudge that the church members had held on to for forty years.

Conflict and bitterness in the church might be the single most damaging thing to the work of the gospel. We need to be sure that in our church we do not let any hindrance in our relationships keep the gospel moving forward. Could you imagine moving to that town and looking for a church? You would probably ask to be directed to the nearest town where the people could meet together as one congregation.

Read

Philippians 4:1-3 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Paul wants to make it clear how important it is for members of a church to get along together in peace and harmony. It seems so difficult for people to get along with one another. If you would talk to someone who does the hiring of college graduates for a major business you would find that he is not worried about the grade point average. Very seldom is someone not hired because they are not able to perform the arithmetic required for the job or the reading required for the job. Nine times out of ten when a young person enters the job market the problems found are relating to the other workers. They find it very difficult to relate properly to others around them. It is so important in the church that we can look others in the eye and say I love you in the name of Jesus Christ and that we let no hindrances come in our walk with Christ because of our relationship to others.

What a blessing it is for a congregation when it gets a vision to start a mission. That mission is blessed of the Lord and starts to grow and pretty soon the mission becomes self supporting and the mission church

constitutes to be its own self governing church. But two become separated. But it is an entirely different matter when churches because of inward turmoil divide and split and become two separate congregations. The difference is that one honors the Lord and the other is a disgrace to the name of the Lord.

It is inevitable with a congregation with so many people that differences are going to arise among the people. Yet we need to agree and seek to work out reconciliation with others. Inner conflict in a church that interrupts the work of Christ is a very serious matter. Paul in the book of Philippians has been making passing reference to inner conflict in this beloved church. When we think back to the great churches of the first century and the church at Philippi was probably one of the greatest of them all. But this church stood on the brink of destruction because of the internal conflict between the individuals of the church.

Paul's first instructions to them is to stand firm in verse one. Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! In chapter 3 Paul was exhorting the church to press on in Christ, and he was reminding them of their heavenly citizenship.

He says with all that, therefore stand firm in the Lord. There is the introduction of a new section here about a church controversy. But Paul wants his church to know that although we want peace in the church, even though we want to rid ourselves of all the fractures that divide us that it in no way means that we compromise our message in Jesus Christ.

There are certain things that we must stand for. We believe in the incarnation of Christ; that he is fully God and fully man. We believe it is because of the sins of man that Christ went to the cross was crucified and rose again. We cannot compromise that message. There are many who would ask us to compromise that message.

Recently I read an article in the paper that said that those who believe that Jesus is the only way have a closed mind and a pinched heart. They went on to ask why not let all ways to God be thought of as being equal? Why say Christ is the only way? That may sound attractive, but in reality that is a cruel message. Jesus said he was the only way. He came on a mission of love when he died for the world. We preach Jesus as the only way. We must stand firm on that conviction. Paul tells this church that he loves to stand firm.

Paul loved this church in Philippi with all his heart. In verse 4 he calls them brothers. He told them he loved them and longed for them. They were his joy and his crown. There are enemies of this church that would like the church to compromise its basic position. Paul says no, stand firm. Some of the attacks against the church may be subtle and some may be more direct, but whichever the case we need to, without any shame, stand firm on the essentials of the gospel. Jesus died, was buried and rose again and he is the only way to God. That we must insist on.

As badly as we may want peace in the church if we have to compromise on that message then we have gained nothing. We must stand firm on the basics of our faith in Christ. That is what Paul is calling for in this text. But after establishing this Paul moves into the heart of the message. He wants those in conflict to seek agreement in the Lord. Paul has mentioned this disagreement but he now becomes specific and names the two ladies in the church who were at odds with each other, Euodia and Syntyche. Paul asked these two ladies to resolve their differences in a manner that honored the Lord.

There were two parties involved in this disagreement. Paul did not ask who first wronged who. Paul says to both of them, I want you to be reconciled together. He is not concerned who was the first one to do something offensive. His concern was that these two Christians be reconciled in Christ. Paul loved this church and he knew that the vitality and mission of this church was in jeopardy. This conflict had the potential to spread and divide the whole church.

When there is a problem among us we need to seek to work it out. What does an argument that took place 2000 years ago between two ladies have to do with us here today? It has so much to do with what our purpose is about. First of all it lets us know that even in the first century they had their problems. We talk about getting the old time religion, but we need to remember that even the old time religion of the first century had its difficulties. Here were two beloved members of the church at odds with each other. So we need to remember that things were not always so rosy in the first century. They had their difficulties. But another thing this passage tells us is that these difficulties must be worked out.

There must be a coming together of those whose conflict has the potential of fragmenting the fellowship of this church. God expects the Hatfields and McCoys to live together in one church and not just be tolerant of one another, but to love each other in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here were two women in conflict of whom Paul said, their names were written in the Book of Life. In other words these are genuine believers in Christ.

These are not pretenders who have come into the church. These are truly Christians who are at odds with each other. Paul says they worked along with him by his side. These are prominent church members. These women are great Christian leaders if they worked along side the Apostle Paul. They were probably at the very heart of the founding of the Philippian church, along with other women like Lydia the seller of purple. These were important women and prominent in the Philippian church. Their conflict threatened the life of the fellowship. When we have conflict we must carefully seek the mind of Christ. Human pride, the pride of the flesh, personal ambition can get in the way. We need to seek with prayer for the mind of Christ.

Jesus emphasized how important it is for Christians to relate rightly to one another. Look back to Mathew 18:21-22. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Jesus said in Mathew chapter 5:23-25 23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Before we come to worship we should remember that how we relate to our brothers and sisters in Christ affects our relationship to God. Jesus made that clear. He asked how will people really know you are disciples of Christ? He said it is how you love one another.

Nothing hurts so badly as to be injured inside of God's house. It is so tragic when you find countless people who don't go to church because somehow they were injured in their service to God. It is so tragic because what should happen is reconciliation. Paul says to seek agreement in the Lord. If you have a disagreement then you should seek agreement in the Lord. You know that God has forgiven you of so much, more than you could ever forgive someone else. So we need to do as Paul says here and seek agreement with those we have difficulty with.

How do you know if you have a relationship that needs this kind of reconciliation? For one thing this is an issue that needs sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. It is something that needs to be approached with much prayer. You need to remember that it is reconciliation that you seek, not revenge. Paul did not say to get even in the Lord. He said to seek agreement in the Lord.

It may mean humbling yourself to go to another person. It may be you have wronged them or they have wronged you, but according to this passage, in either case seek agreement. That is when a church really gives a testimony when with all the diversity there is a harmony in the Lord.

Seeking reconciliation from others will prevent you from having bitterness and resentment in your life that can keep you from a proper relationship with the Lord. Paul tells the church to stand firm, don't compromise your message. He tells them to seek reconciliation. Then Paul says to seek others who can help you in your reconciliation.

Paul calls on a trusted servant to help these two women in conflict, look at verse 3. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, a help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Paul appeals to someone else in the fellowship for help. This is someone who obviously had the trust of the fellowship. Paul not only told these two to be reconciled with one another, but he also called on someone else who could help them be reconciled. Maybe you are stand in the role of a yoke fellow.

Maybe you need to help two Christians to agree together in the Lord. It is so helpful at times when someone who is not emotionally involved in a conflict helps two people come together in Christ. I am thankful that on many occasions I have been helped by a third person. I had a division with a roommate before I was married. With good help we don't have to leave in conflict, but we can seek agreement in the Lord.

It takes a mature person in Christ, but we desperately need those who are peace makers. Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers. We need people who can help those Christians in conflict with one another. Are you a peacemaker? God wants you to seek agreement with all your brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is not a call to meddle in the affairs of others. It means to compassionately help others be united in Christ. This conflict in the church in Philippi could glorify the Lord or cause destruction in the church. Paul makes an appeal to those who could help. This is his beloved church and he wants to see nothing destroy it. But he knows that the one thing that could destroy this great church is unresolved conflict.

Maybe you have a conflict with someone. There could be someone who can help you reach an agreement in the Lord. We need to spend time evaluating our relationship with others. It is so important. We need to ask God to show us if there is really reconciliation that needs to take place.

Weather you have been offended or you know of a situation where you have offended someone else, we need to seek agreement in the Lord. You can just ask the Lord in a prayerful way if there is someone we need to seek agreement with in the Lord. This kind of reconciliation is vital for your walk with God and for our church.

The Prescription for an anxious heart, Philippians 4:4-7



You see anxiety is like a sickness. It is a spiritual illness that needs a cure. And we have in these verses Philippians 4:4-7 the prescription that God gives for an anxious heart.

Do people really struggle with anxiety? Is that something that is real or are we just talking when we say people in our day have anxious hearts? You have heard of Ann Landers, she got about 10,000 letters a month about people's problems.

She was asked, what is the number one problem that people have? It all boils down to anxiety. She said people are afraid of losing their health. People are afraid of losing their wealth. People are afraid of losing their loved ones. She said people are afraid of life itself. This could be described as anxiety of the heart.

That is what we find to be the number one problem today, anxiety of the heart. It was the problem two thousand years ago too, because Jesus said on the sermon of the Mount that we should not worry about our physical concerns, about our clothing, about putting food on the table, we should not even be worried about tomorrow because each day had enough troubles of its own.

Do not have this kind of anxiety. Here we are in the age of computers and space rockets and advanced internet technology and the problem we have is the same as two thousand years ago, or in any time, anxiety in the heart.

It does not matter if you are a young person dealing with anxiety regarding your parents, your popularity or your grades in school. If you are young parents with anxiety about your children. If you are grandparents or great grandparents whoever it is you are not exempt from this problem we call anxiety.

If anxiety is the number one problem that plagues the human race then we should ask an important question. Is anxiety just for those who do not know Christ? Or does anxiety exist in the walls of this church in the lives of Christians?

I remember the time when I was about to finish seminary and I was looking for my first pastorate position. I remember going to two older men and explaining to them the frustrations I was having not finding a church to pastor. I said to them I put out one hundred resumes in 25 states and I haven't even heard a response. Even a rejection letter would have been an encouragement to me. To at least know someone has read one of my resumes.

I was expecting these two men to say something like, don't worry you will get a position that is just right for you. But instead the first one said, you know that I just read an article that among Southern Baptist ministers there are 30,000 trained ministers who do not have any ministry position. When I heard these words I just sank down in my chair.

The next man said, if you think that's bad then hear this, I am from the state of Arkansas and for every one minister in the pulpit we have there unemployed ministers that cannot find a position. After hearing all this I had to struggle with the problem of an anxious heart. None of us are exempt from the problem of anxiety if we are a Christian or not. Anxiety can come upon anyone.

Paul has been dealing in this chapter with the church in Philippi. He has been writing about conflict in the church. One Christian in conflict with the other. Paul did all he could to bring peace among these Christians. But real peace is more than just the absence of conflict.

We might be in good fellowship and harmony with one another, but there still might not be real peace inside of us because real peace is internal. Real peace comes within the heart. The tranquility of the soul and the assurance that comes with trust in God. That is what real peace is. That is what God wants us to have.

The Christian was never meant to live a life filled with anxiety, but rather the Christian was meant to live in peace. Anxiety displeases God. If we are really quite frank about it we can call anxiety what it is, sin. You see anxiety is like a sickness. It is a spiritual illness that needs a cure. And we have in these verses the prescription that God gives for an anxious heart.

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again rejoice.

The first thing that Paul points out to these Christians struggling with anxiety is found in verse 4. He tells them to rejoice. Paul has been speaking about unity. He has been speaking about peace and about conflict resolution. He is now about to emphasize some of the positive attributes that we need as believers if we are going to be free from anxiety.

Paul speaks about joy again and again in this book. He wants the church to be people of joy. Christianity was never meant to be something apart from joy. Authentic Christianity is a lifestyle of joy. If people want joy they will find it in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Joy itself is an inward quality of life. Why do authentic Christians have joy? Because of the abiding presence of Christ in their lives. Jesus promised believers a full and meaningful life. They have joy because they have a glorious future hope in Christ. All these things that give the believers in Christ joy, none of them have anything to do with circumstance.

Paul told the Christians in Philippi to rejoice. Remember that Paul wrote this letter from prison on death row. Here was Paul waiting to find out if he will be sentenced to death or if he would be let go. He had all this to deal with but he told the believers to rejoice, have joy in your life. How could there be joy in this kind of situation? Because true joy in Christ is not connected to circumstances.

To have joy it does not matter if you are going through difficult times. We can still experience true joy in Jesus Christ even in the midst of very difficult and trying times. Paul calls the church of the first century, who faced all kinds of difficulties, to joy.

Philippians 4:5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

What we see in verse 5 is another internal characteristic. Let your gentleness be evident to all. Your Bible may say have moderation or considerateness. It may say softness. Whatever the translation it is a call to the Christian to understand other people. It calls us to oppose all arrogance in our own walk with God. It is a quality that allows us to bear the injustices of life with patience. The Lord is near. We have the abiding presence of the Lord. This should cause us to have a lifestyle of gentleness and understanding of others.

It is the kind of quality that we put ourselves in the shoes of another person. Yesterday I went on one of my long and grueling bicycle rides. I often do this on Saturday morning meeting with about a dozen other cyclists. We have this group and each one takes turns leading in the front. It turns out that when you lead in the front the wind is giving resistance and it is said to be forty percent more energy is used than riding behind another cyclist.

So we are sure that everyone is going to take their turn up front. But there was one guy who rode yesterday who had just a couple of years ago been hit by a car and his legs had been broken. When he was up front we were not so concerned that everyone take their turn. The others told him to get to the back and save your energy and rest.

That is the kind of quality that Paul is calling Christians to. An understanding of the other person and what they have been through. It requires putting yourself in their position. Then to act in kindness is a way you would hope others would treat you. That is what Paul calls the Christians to, a life of joy and life of gentleness.

Then Paul switches from the positive Characteristics and gives a negative command. He says do not be anxious. He says I do not want you to be anxious. Now we talk about the hard sayings of the Bible that are difficult to live up to and this is one of them. How many people as hard as they try not to be anxious still find themselves over and overcome with anxiety when the difficulties come and they begin to worry.

When we become anxious, and that anxiety fills our hearts as much as we hate to admit it we are actually saying God, I really can't trust you with this one. I have to take this inside of myself and worry and become anxious. I just don't have the ability to trust you God with this problem.

That kind of anxiety has no place in the life of a Christian. The root idea of anxiety is like a mind that is divided and can not find a place of rest. In Matthew chapter 6 Jesus said. "That's why I'm telling you to stop worrying about your life-what you will eat or what you will drink-or about your body-what you will wear. So never worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Here is the apostle Paul writing this. He could have been anxious about so much there on death row. If anybody who should be anxious it is a person in prison on death row. But Paul said do not be anxious.

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Paul actually gives the secret. He does not want people to be anxious, but he knows it is not enough to just say not to be anxious. If anxiety is a spiritual sickness then we are going to need a prescription. Paul says in Philippians 4:6 what the prescription but in everything in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

The prescription for a troubled heart is prayer. It almost seems too simple. You ask with all this anxiety you are telling me all I have got to do is pray? Yes. You see Paul says take it to the Lord in prayer. If anxiety is dividing our mind and causing us to have this division where we cannot find a way to be settled then prayer is focusing our mind on God and giving us the peace of a settled mind. The answer to the problem of anxiety is prayer.

One person may say, but my problem is so big that you could not understand my problem. That may be true, but God can understand your problem. There is no problem you can have that is so big that God cannot understand that. Someone else may say, but my problem causing me anxiety is so small that I would not want to trouble God with it. Let me tell you that there is no trouble that is too small. That is what the Bible tells us to do, to take anything that is causing us anxiety to God in prayer.

Have we any trials? Have we any troubles anywhere? We need not be discouraged but take it to the Lord in prayer. Anxiety contradicts a life of faith. We need a life of faith and trust in God but anxiety destroys that faith. When the storms rage internally God wants us to have tranquility in our soul.

Have you ever talked to someone who is plagued with anxiety? A person that whatever they did they could not get away from anxiety that was on them like a heavy weight. Then you go back and talk to them again. You bring it up and ask them about the problem and how it is going. It is almost like they did not remember it and they say, well I prayed about that and God gave me a peace. That is exactly what Paul is telling us to do, to pray about what gives us anxiety. This anxiety will come to all of us and we are to take it to God in prayer. That is the prescription for an anxious heart.

We see the result of taking our anxieties to God in prayer. The result is peace in our lives. That person who says I prayed about it and God gave me peace experiences the cure for their anxious heart through prayer.

Philippians 4:7 Then the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Peace cannot be explained. We can experience peace, but we cannot explain it. It is a divine gift that comes from God so our circumstances cannot change this peace.

Did you read the story in the newspaper of a young seminary student who had a gun put to his head and threatened to be killed? He was shot twice with blanks and even though they were blanks it still caused his head to bleed. He said that during that time he prayed to God. He even prayed for the salvation of those who had a gun to his head and who had stolen his car. He prayed about it. He said he was overcome with peace.

Do you see the result of really taking our anxiety to God? The result is peace. If someone had a gun put to their head and their life threatened could find peace in prayer then you can find peace , whatever you are anxious about.

Revival of the Mind, Philippians 4:8-9



Did you know that your brain has stored more information than is in the entire library of congress with all its 17 million volumes? That is pretty amazing for a little machine inside your head that only weighs about 3 pounds.

Psychologists tell us that each person has about ten thousand thoughts per day. I find that an encouragement. You see that means you have at least a one in ten thousand chance of having a good thought every day.

Much of the whole thought process remains a mystery to scientists and psychologists. But one thing is not a mystery about the mind. How you think is going to affect your Christian life. How you think will make a profound difference in how you represent our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know in the hospital before a surgeon is about to do surgery he is going to scrub his hands over and over. Why? Because no one wants that surgery performed until the surgeon's hands are clean. As Christians we have a ministry to perform. And just like the surgeon who needs clean hands for surgery we need to have clean minds.

In these verses Paul emphasizes the need for a good thought life. The Christian life is more than just the external. It is more than a list of rules, obeying the dos and refraining from the don'ts. The Christian life is something internal and that is more challenging than obeying a set of rules.

Christianity is about the internal and about your thought life. We must transform our thought life. You may need a revival of the mind. The Bible speaks about this kind of transformation in your life. It will transform your Christian life if you can keep your thoughts on things that are pleasing to God.

When someone commits a sin it is most likely a manifestation of what has already taken place in their mind. Do you remember when that little shepherd boy, David took a smooth stone and put it in a sling and embedded it in the head of the giant Goliath? After that giant fell David became known throughout the land and people were singing a song and the refrain went, Saul has killed his thousands but, David his ten thousands.

Well Saul began to think about that and the jealousy brewed inside of his mind. Before long Saul was hurling a spear to kill David. Why? Because it began in the thought life. Even king David himself had his famous sin with Bathsheba. Where did it begin? It began in the thought life. If we really want to transform the Christianity in the church then we need to transform our mind. There needs to be a revival of the mind.

The first thing Paul does in these verses is to tell us to put our mind on good things. Look at verse 8 He says, Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy –think about such things.

Paul gives us all these characteristics to put our mind on. The human mind is going to set itself on something. The question is on what? Paul says he that wants our minds to be on the things that are honoring and pleasing to God.

The Christian mind does not belong in the gutter. No, Paul says the Christian mind should be on thoughts that are worthy to be taken before the Lord our God. On thoughts that are praiseworthy and excellent. Paul calls the Christian to have thoughts that are high and lofty thoughts.

How you think is so important. It is important because how you think forms your character. A sure way to experience renewal is to have your thoughts on things that are worthy of praise. That is how a revival of your mind begins.

Listen to what Romans 12:2 says “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” We need not conform to the world. We must be transformed. Our thought life must be different. The best way is to keep the bad thoughts out of your mind is to concentrate on the good thoughts.

Paul does not simply say from now on I want you to no longer think of any bad thoughts. He instead goes the positive route. He says I want you to think on good thoughts. Try an experiment now. Just for a moment picture in your mind a rhinoceros on the plains of Africa. Picture this in your mind. Do you see that rhinoceros there?

Now stop thinking about that rhinoceros. No longer have any thoughts of the rhinoceros in your mind. You might find that difficult. You just can't stop thinking about something. If you want to stop thinking about something you should redirect your thoughts somewhere else. If you picture a giraffe in your mind you will no longer be thinking about the rhinoceros.

That is the kind of help Paul is giving us. He does not just say stop thinking your bad thoughts that are dragging you down in your Christian life, but let your mind be on exalted thoughts worthy of praise. Think on the things that are good and honorable. That is the positive way Paul gives us to keep our minds right before God.

Saint Jerome said he struggled with the thoughts that were in his mind. He said the one thing that really helped his thought life was translating the Hebrew Bible into Latin. Now you may try that yourself at home, but it really is not practical for the overwhelming majority of us.

So how do we find a practical way to keep our mind on thoughts that please God? We need to do it by keeping our mind on the thoughts as we read them in this verse. Paul gives us eight virtues to keep our mind on. As the New English version says, fill your thoughts with these things. These kinds of thoughts are where we must direct those ten thousand thoughts a day that we have. We should have our thoughts on the things that honor God.

Each of us has our own battle to fight. The battle for the mind is to have a mind that is pure and honorable before our Lord. How do we do this? Do we lock ourselves in a monastery and shut ourselves off from everything in the world?

If we did that we would be ignoring so much other admonition in scripture and the goal to reach other people for Christ. We have this dilemma. We must be out there where all these bad influences on our mind are found. We must because if we are going to have an influence for Christ we must be out where the people are. Yet when we are out where the people are so many things there are not pleasing to Christ.

I like the way Larry Poland who is the founder, chairman, and CEO of Mastermedia International <http://www.mastermediaintl.org/> puts it. He gives us a balance. He is in an area of ministry to Hollywood

with people who make the television productions. His ministry is influencing them for Christ. He knows that Christians are not going to turn off their TVs so he came up with a positive way to keep your mind on thoughts pleasing to God.

In His ministry to people in Hollywood he said every time you are watching television and you see something that goes against your Christian values he said pray for those who are producing that. Pray for your own mind and for those who will be influenced by that program. Imagine if you did that every time you were watching a show. The time Christians spend watching television may be turned into a gigantic prayer session.

I think we could apply this to almost any area of life. Whenever we are out where the people are and whenever something comes before us that will take us away from Christ then we can stop at that moment and pray for that influence. We can right then and there pray for our own mind and for others who will be effected by what also caused us to have thoughts not pleasing to God.

There is another thing we can do to experience this revival of the mind. We can keep our mind on God's Word. Psalm 1 says, blessed is the man who delights in God's law he meditates on it day and night. He will be like a tree planted by streams of water. Whatever he does prospers.

Keeping our mind on scripture means our minds are on things that are praiseworthy. We need to memorize scripture so that when those times come when our minds are dragged away from things pleasing to God we can focus on the scripture we have in our minds.

How did Jesus face Satan in the wilderness? What was his weapon to keep from being dragged away? How did he withstand letting his mind be dragged away from things pleasing to God? He used scripture. Jesus quoted the scripture he had memorized. If we want to keep our minds pure we are going to need to memorize scripture.

Paul talks about our minds as the battleground for spiritual warfare. He said in 2 Corinthians 10:5, We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Could you imagine if we took every thought captive? If we take the ten thousand thoughts a day figure then for every one hundred Christians there are one million thoughts in one day to take captive for Christ. If that happened we would not only have a revival of our own mind, but there would be a corporate revival as well. Take every thought and make it captive and obedient to Christ.

When you put your mind on things pleasing to God you are waging a battle against the unseen enemy. It is spiritual warfare. Keeping your mind on the pure thoughts will make the difference in you becoming more like Christ.

Paul not only calls for a revival of the mind, but he moves from the thoughts of the mind into action. He says in verse 9, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice."

Take those thoughts captive for Christ, but don't just let them stay as thoughts, put them into practice. Paul had been an example before the Christians at Philippi. They had seen his life and the way he preached and how his life was consistent with his message. Now Paul says what you have seen of me put it into practice.

One good deed is worth more than one thousand good intentions. It won't do to have a good Christian life only in our thoughts, but it must impact our actions too. We must have a pure thought life yes, but we are called beyond that into right actions.

Paul uses his own life as an example. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-put it into practice. Paul followed the example of Jesus and he is calling others to follow his example of following Christ.

If teachers want their students to learn something they have their students put the lesson into action. We must do more than meditating on scripture. It means putting the Word of God into practice in our lives. The Bible calls us to take our thoughts captive for God's honor and to put those thoughts into actions.

What is the result of having thoughts that honor God? Paul tells us; The God of Peace will be with you. The result of a pure mind is that you will have the presence of God. The God of peace will be with you.

The Secret of Contentment



Have you noticed that there are very few people who are content with what they have? What you probably have observed is a widespread discontentment. So what is the secret for those who really have found true contentment?

There are a lot of Secrets People are trying to promote:

- Secret of success
- Secret to riches
- Secret of romance

There is no secret that could be more important for you and probably less promoted than the secret of contentment. The Apostle Paul speaks about being content in every situation and he tells us the secret to contentment in Philippians 4:10-13.

Comparison breeds discontentment. I saw a picture of two mules eating grass. It was a humorous picture because the mules were in different pastures separated by a fence. The mules were next to each other and both mules had their head through the fence eating from each others pasture.

Paul wants others to know the secret of contentment. He didn't spend his time comparing himself to Peter, James and John. This is one reason Paul experienced contentment. He knew a deliverance from dependence on things and circumstances with complete dependence on Jesus Christ.

Read Phil 4:10-13

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have

learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Paul's letter that we know as Philippians was to a large extent, a thank you note to the Philippian church. They gave Paul a financial gift to support his ministry and they gave their gift sacrificially.

Paul wants the Philippian church to know that he rejoices in Christ for their gift, not because he needs it, but because of the blessing they will receive in giving. Why doesn't Paul need the gift? Because he is perfectly content with the circumstances as they are, not content in himself, but in Christ.

Socrates was asked, who is the wealthiest man? He who is content with least because contentment is nature's wealth. Paul is content with little because of who he is in Christ.

For the Christian the amount of material possessions should be immaterial for contentment. The one who needs more to be content has their focus on their own needs. They are not using their life to glorify God and expand his kingdom.

Showing concern vs 10

The gift the Philippians gave was a tangible demonstration of their concern for Paul. He started the work in Philippi and he was beaten and imprisoned because of it. Ultimately Paul considered their gift from the Lord who planted the idea there among the Christians to give Paul a gift.

Paul says I rejoice greatly in the Lord.

You renewed your concern. Literally their concern was in bloom again. The word picture here is of a barren tree putting forth new shoots to bloom again. They were sprouting new shoots for the concern of Paul's welfare.

Not because they didn't care before, but they lacked opportunity to express concern. Paul rejoiced. They sent a gift to him and sent along Epaphroditus to minister. The only thing they had lacked was opportunity not the willingness.

Some time had elapsed since they had given him a gift. Paul concluded it was not because of their lack of concern, only lack of opportunity.

The secret of contentment vs. 11-12

There was a survey among people from poor to rich and it asked how much would you need to be content? The answer was usually, just a little bit more. No matter what an individual made, he felt like if he had a little bit more he would be content.

So many people go into unnecessary debt because they want more than they can afford. The problem for those who need a little bit more, is that they will stay discontent and always need a little bit more. Contentment becomes a matter of the heart, not a matter of your bank account.

Paul's Peace and joy did not depend on the circumstances. It's a good thing because circumstances were not usually very good for Paul.

In verse twelve he appeals to readers to learn his secret. I have learned the secret. Not self sufficiency but Christ sufficiency. Paul was content in every circumstance because in every circumstance he knew Christ's power.

Paul says he knew both abundance and need. There is a worldly mindset that says when you have abundance you will be content and when you have need you are discontent. This is not the way it works. True contentment goes beyond our circumstances. Contentment is not a human achievement but a divine gift.

Don't deceive yourself to think that more of anything brings contentment. Only more of Christ brings contentment. This is Paul's secret to contentment. Paul said I have learned to be content whatever the circumstance.

A man overheard someone say, "I would really be content if I just had \$100." He gave that man the \$100 only to hear him say, "I should have said \$200."

Paul knew that real contentment came from a deeper understanding of God and our relationship with Him.

Paul specifically states his formula for contentment is vs.13. Do everything through Christ. He says, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Material resources don't have enough power to enable you to do the things that will bring contentment. Only Christ provides the strength to do what God calls you to do. That will bring contentment.

The secret to contentment isn't more things. It is more of Christ fully empowering your life. Until you learn the secret of contentment you will never be all you can be for Christ. In Christ you find your purpose that brings contentment.

Don't let your energies be focused on more and more possessions, but on more and more of Christ in your life. Paul traces true contentment, despite the circumstances, right to the source, Christ within. This is the secret that needs to be told.

Paul could accomplish all God intended through the strength in Christ. Contentment is unrelated to circumstances. We sometimes depend on Christ most when economic matters are difficult. We say "I don't know how we will make it". That is the time to depend on the Lord in every situation. In my weakness Christ's power is made known.

When you learn contentment there is a new freedom there. You will have a contentment that breaks the cycle of covetness. You will experience a freedom to live God's purposes in your life. You will be able to give joyfully to the Lord's work. You will know an empowerment to do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

The Joy of Giving



Maybe if you think back you can remember when someone gave you a gift that really blessed you. I recently have been thinking back on different occasions when I was blessed by a gift. In Philippians 4:14-19 Paul says that he was blessed by a gift.

The book of Philippians to a large extent is a thank you note from Paul to the church for a financial gift. How much they gave to Paul we don't know. But Paul expresses something very encouraging about giving. It is not only the one who receives the gift who is blessed.

God is pleased and blesses and provides for the giver. In this passage Paul tells of his profound thanks. It is so amazing because Philippians one of the poorest churches in the New Testament was one of the greatest giving churches.

Philippians 4:14-19

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Philippians shared with Paul to relieve his suffering. This church had considerations for Paul's needs. Starting with verse 14 Paul builds on his words he shared about contentment. He is content without the gift, yet the gift still meant a great deal to him.

The church gave materially to Paul but received they spiritually from the Lord. The Philippians were the one who received the greater blessing. Philippians is known as the epistle of joy and it is written to the giving church. Joy and giving go hand in hand.

Paul valued the gift but his greatest joy was how it blessed them before God. This is encouraging when I think of all the people who have given me gifts. That God will bless them.

There is such a joy in giving, a freedom and a blessing. Giving is a barometer of your spiritual condition. Paul's words remind us of what Jesus said in Acts 20:35, Remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." In Matthew 10:8 Jesus said "Freely you have received, freely give."

Giving Pleases God 17-18

In verse 17 Paul says, Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.

Is it possible to be more concerned with the giving than with the actual gift itself? Think of the parent that receives a mothers or fathers day gift from their child. That parent is thrilled with the gift even if it has no material value. There is joy to the parent that their child gave them a gift.

That is Paul's reaction here. He started this church and it blesses him that they have a giving heart. It is no wonder that Paul is pleased. Giving and freedom go together. Those who are a giving people have a freedom in all their areas of life.

Giving is more than a physical act it is a spiritual exercise. It is a joy to Paul who started this church to find them obedient in the area of giving. They will be greatly used by the Lord. In Vs 18 Paul's heart overflows. He was content before but now he is blessed and overflowing.

He received in full and nothing more is due him. He made it clear that this was a thank you note and not a subtle hint to send him more funds. He described their gift as sweet smelling incense offered to the Lord.

The gift is comparable to the whole burnt offering which the Israelites brought to God and that is described in Leviticus 1:9 9 "an aroma pleasing to the LORD."

Philippians is possibly the poorest church, but they did not want to be robbed of their opportunity to share in God's ministry.

The Macedonian churches pleaded with Paul for an opportunity to give to his work. 2 Corinthians 8:4, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service (giving) to the saints. Jesus had no home, no real material possessions to speak of, but He was the richest person that ever lived, He shared in God's resources. And so will the person who lives totally for God. Giving opens us to God's gifts. In 4:15 he refers to giving as a matter of giving and receiving. True Christian giving does not seek to get blessing for their giving, but they end up receives them. This is not the prosperity gospel that says to get things you give to get. You should give out of a grateful heart, freely you received freely give. But when you give to God he meets your needs as he did for Paul. Paul did not have a fancy car (or the first century equivalent) or live in luxury. But God met Paul's need. He met the Philippians needs. He will meet your needs according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus. God Provides for the giver. Whenever we give any gift we could always find some reason not to give it. We could have used the money to meet our own physical needs. There are always needs pressing in from every direction. But read verse 19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

God would care for the needs of the Philippians even if they were poor. All Paul could do was thank them for the gift, but God could supply all their needs. No gift given with Christ like motivation to God's work has ever made a person poorer.

How can we give to the Lord's work in a bad economy? I can say give generously, give sacrificially and joy will abound and God will provide your needs. This goes for your physical needs and spiritual needs. This is not off the top of my head but right out of verses 18-19.

Giving stretches your faith. It is like an extreme sport for living by faith. God bountifully blesses those who give graciously according to God's purposes. Go on give and boldly!

