

INSTRUCTIONS
Review of Philippians-Part Two
The Book of Philippians #39

Last week I provided a review of Paul's journey to Philippi – how he got there, what he experienced along the way, and the joys and sorrows of preaching the gospel in Philippi itself. Today, I am going to provide an overview of the letter he wrote to the Philippians.

To me, what stands out in the book of Philippians is Paul's willingness to be the example for every believer to imitate. For that reason we're going to take a look at several areas where Paul sets the example of how to follow Christ in the midst of whatever circumstance you are in – in humble means or prosperity, being filled or going hungry, having abundance or suffering need.

There are ten areas which point to Paul as an example of how to live obediently and faithfully for Christ. These areas are:

Servanthood
Confidence
Life and Death
Cooperation
Value
Forgetting
Observation
Provision
Glory
Grace

SERVANTHOOD

Paul opens his letter to the Philippian church with these seven words – “*Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus.*” Though Jesus says He no longer calls us slaves but instead calls us friends (John 15:15), the idea of being a bond-servant to Christ still holds true. By using these words to describe his relationship with Jesus Paul is setting the standard for all of us.

The definition of a bond-servant is “*one who is devoted to another to the disregard of his own interests*”. Romans 6:22 says we have been freed from sin and enslaved to God. As former slaves to sin we have been bought with the precious blood of Christ and are now indebted to the One who purchased our freedom (1 Corinthians 1:20). In gratitude we devote ourselves to Him following His will while disregarding our own.

By calling himself a bond-servant Paul is in essence saying, “*This is the standard of measure for those who would follow Christ. All who claim Him as their Lord and Master must be measured against this standard. So take inventory of your interests and determine where your true devotion lies. See how you measure up to this standard. Then decide how willing you are to place His interests above your own. And if you have any questions about how this works out in real life, look at my example and follow it.*” So even in his greeting Paul is challenging us to imitate him.

CONFIDENCE

Paul next speaks of his confidence in the Lord's ability to conform the Philippians to the image of Christ. He says this in verse 6:

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

The reason Paul is so confident that God will perfect His work in them is because God through the Holy Spirit is doing the work. They, like we, are partakers of the same Spirit of grace that Paul received (Phil 1:7). It is this partaking of God's grace that gives Paul the confidence to say what he says.

There is a certain trust that comes from Paul's knowledge of the Philippians that they will cooperate with the Spirit, for all can resist Him. In this sense this verse can be specifically applied to the Philippians. But it is God who began the good work in all of us and it is He alone who is able to perfect it. And that is why I believe this is a universal truth.

We have a part to play but, like the Philippians, we must understand from the beginning that it is not by our works that perfection comes. It is only through the resting work of Christ that we could ever have any part in God's perfection. As long as we do so we, like Paul, can be confident that God will keep perfecting His work in us until the Day of Christ Jesus.

We all experience times in our lives when we feel like we are not making any progress in our spiritual life. But this verse reminds us that when God starts a project, He completes it. God will help us grow in His grace, continually working until He has completed His work in our lives. When we are discouraged we need this reminder – God will never give up on us, He promises to finish what He started.

LIFE AND DEATH

When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian church he was imprisoned in Rome and was uncertain whether he would die in prison or live to see them again. That's when he wrote these encouraging words.

PHILIPPIANS 1:21

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

When Paul said, “to live is Christ”, he was expressing the truth upon which he built his life. After living in his own strength, trying to keep all the commandments of God, he came to realize by revelation that it is and always has been by faith that we attain God's forgiveness. When he found forgiveness in Christ he found true life. And the life he then lived was by faith. From that moment on, ceasing to live by his own strength, he began to live by the strength which God supplied.

For Paul all the missing pieces came together as one united whole when Christ interrupted his life on the road to Damascus. And through his continued faith in Christ his life was filled with purpose. No longer centered on fulfilling the Law he spent his life fulfilling the obligation that came as a result of the grace that was given to him.

Faith placed in material things will fail but faith placed in the unseen will stand firm in the midst of trial and loss. To live for self is to die to God. To die to self is to live for God. But there is a gain that comes from this death, not only in this life but in the life to come. For a Christian this comes immediately after God releases our spirit from our mortal body upon our death.

There is no waiting period, no intermediate place to go prior to heaven (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). When

God takes our earthly breath away He opens up the gates of Heaven for us and welcomes us into His eternal presence. We are immediately granted the inheritance that is reserved for us in heaven, imperishable and undefiled which will never fade away (1 Peter 1:4). Tears are gone, all mourning, crying, and pain will have passed away. All of God's bond-servants will see His face and serve Him for eternity (Revelation 21:4; 22:3-4). This is the gain which Paul and all followers of Christ look forward to by faith.

COOPERATION

The rewards of living a life of faith await all who believe in Christ. But the genuineness of that faith must be lived out here on earth; and the evidence of our faith should be visible to all.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-14

“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

Once again we are reminded that it is God Himself who is at work in us to bring about the perfection He requires of us. But what does it mean to work out your salvation with fear and trembling?

The word translated here as “work out” refers to producing something, to do something from which something else results. If you are a talented artist then when you paint a picture or sing a song you are producing something outwardly which is already inwardly present. You are bringing forth externally that which is already present internally. You are working out the talent which is already present in you.

If you produced no painting or failed to sing a single note no one would ever be able to discern that you were an artist. There would be no visible proof to back up your claim. And the teacher that taught you how to paint or how to sing would see no visible proof of his training. No one could say you were a student of his if there was no outward evidence of his training.

Since no one is born with salvation implanted in them from birth, it is impossible for anyone to bring forth salvation on their own. Man cannot bring forth something which he does not have. And there is no act of deed which could bring about salvation since salvation is a gift. But once the gift of salvation is received then there is something man can do to work out this salvation.

That's because, though salvation occurs in a moment in time, it is not a one-time event. It is not only a confession but also a service of the heart and mind as well. Out of the mind comes the will to do and out of the heart comes the desire to do. So when the will to obey God and the desire to please him is mixed with the power of God to overcome the flesh, then the salvation of God is made visible, it is worked out into the visible from within the invisible.

For this to happen as God intended it takes our cooperation. Our will needs to be in agreement with God's will in order for the salvation of God to be manifested in us. And that is why Paul tells us to “work out” our salvation. We have a part to play in this process.

VALUE

Paul believed in the resurrection of the dead but he did not believe Jesus rose from the dead. Yet suddenly, on his way to kill all who were followers of the Way, Paul finds himself confronted by a

resurrected Jesus. It was a humbling and mind-blowing experience that went straight to his heart.

Paul had spent his whole life placing value in the Law of God. He was dedicated to it, believing that through the Law he could attain righteousness by obedience and adherence to it. But in a flash of blinding light he discovered that this value was horribly misplaced. Jesus exposed the Law as having no effect on righteousness. Its only purpose was to expose sin (Romans 7:7-11). And Paul's sin was completely exposed on that road to Damascus.

Radically changed by his encounter with the risen Lord, Paul confesses that all he had accomplished and all he had inherited as a descendant of Abraham no longer had any value or purpose for him in his pursuit of righteousness. All that mattered since his encounter was to know Christ Jesus his Lord, for only in Him could true righteousness be found.

Armed with this new knowledge Paul was willing to everything go, all he had accomplished, all that he was and everything he had stood for, in order to more fully gain Christ. To know Christ now held more value than the value he previously had placed in the Law.

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-12

“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things,...

“...and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,...

“...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection of the dead. Not that I have already attained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Paul was willing to leave behind his striving for righteousness through the Law. Once Paul encountered the true righteousness found in Christ he willingly left everything he did under the Law behind, regarding it as rubbish.

It's funny how you can believe a zirconium is a diamond until you place it beside a real diamond. That is when you see how flawed and inferior the false looks beside the genuine. And so it was with Christ and the Law. The Law was the path to salvation and as such was considered a flawless diamond to Paul. But when he placed it beside Christ the Law turned out to be only zirconium, a false path to salvation. So he quickly embraced the true and discarded the false.

All of us cling to what we feel is important, either to keep us safe, keep us alive, or keep us protected. But if we ever come across something that will do a better job we will gladly give up the inferior first for the superior second. Like Paul, we did this in our own pursuit of righteousness. We forsook our personal attempts to gain righteousness for Christ's willingness to impart righteousness to us through His own sacrifice and obedience. Like Paul, we too gave up striving for grace. We gave up the zirconium of this world so that we could possess the diamond of heaven.

FORGETTING

Part of embracing the future that Christ has promised is letting go of the past. Shame and regret over past behavior can have a crippling effect on us. If we allow it the things we used to do can continue to haunt us. Using shame and regret as their anchor past sins can maintain a hold on our emotions no matter how deeply we try and bury them.

PHILIPPIANS 3:14-15

“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize if the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

If anyone should feel ashamed of his actions and wish to hide from the church it would be Paul. All the time he persecuted the church he thought he was the righteous one and the Christians were the blasphemers, but it was just the opposite. Who wouldn't feel shame over such ignorance? Our natural tendency would be to pull away, to sequester ourselves and hope no one whom we used to persecute would recognize or find us. But that is not what Paul did.

Paul acknowledged his former life and did not hide from his past. Why? Because for him it was truly the past and never the present. Just as he tossed aside his belief in the Law to justify his righteousness, he also tossed aside all that he did to achieve it as well as any and all emotional attachment to those deeds, both good and bad. When he tossed aside his past he also tossed aside its emotional baggage. He didn't spend time dwelling on the past because he had too much future to look forward to.

Paul had been granted forgiveness and grace from the Lord for all the evil deeds he had done, even those he did in the name of His heavenly father. But he received more than that. He received emotional grace as well because his emotional involvement in these deeds also needed healing. He did not seek to relieve his pain through his mind alone, an intellectual assent to the truth of God's grace. He also gave his tears and his remorse to the Lord for healing as well.

Satan is a master at mixing the present with the past. He loves to bring up the past so that he can keep us chained to it. But as Paul says we must forget what lies behind, even unfulfilled dreams and promises, and press on toward the goal of heaven. That's not easy to do when you're constantly trying to protect your broken heart from further hurt.

But there is a cure. There is a release for these pent up emotions. There is a Healer for broken hearts and unfulfilled promises Who can calm your fears, understand your tears, and cleanse the shame of the past. Not just through forgiveness of the sinful deed, either done by you or done to you, but also through a healing of the emotions related to these deeds. This is a promise God makes to His people; A promise which Paul claimed as his own.

OBSERVATION

Paul really sums up the point of his writing to the Philippians in chapter 3 and verse 17.

PHILIPPIANS 3:17

“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”

Up to this point Paul has encouraged us that what God has started in us He will complete. He has

encouraged us to face the trials of life knowing that whether we live or die we do all things for the glory of the Father. And if we should die as a result of our faith we will gain much more than this earthly life can ever offer. He's told us to have the same attitude that Jesus Himself had when He voluntarily left heaven to come to earth as a man, humbling Himself even to the point of death so that we might be free from sin.

He has shown us how to forsake the things of this world, as valuable as they were to us at one time, and to leave the past behind; to embrace the future which God has in store for us and to press on toward the goal set before us and the prize that awaits us in Christ.

He finishes his letter by giving us instructions on how to relieve our anxiety and find peace in the midst of turmoil, directing our minds to those things we should be dwelling on. Before he concludes he says that if we follow the things we have learned and received and heard and seen in him that the God of peace will be with us. Even here, Paul is able to point to himself as the example of someone who lives out what he proclaims as the truth.

PROVISION

Paul closes his letter with some final lessons he has learned which he wishes to pass on to us.

PHILIPPIANS 4:11b

“I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:19

“My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Paul was put in prison for preaching the gospel of Christ. While in prison he was suffering from a lack of provision which the Philippian church attempted to alleviate by sending him a gift which Paul called *“a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”*

The Philippians were being persecuted for their faith as well so Paul is passing on the lessons he has learned from his own personal experience of suffering for the gospel of Christ. He is encouraging them that even in their need God will teach them to be content; He will strengthen them to endure the hardships that come their way and will supply all their needs according to His great resources which He has stored up in heaven for them. But as he concludes Paul wants to make sure one thing is foundationally clear: All glory goes to God for what He has done and continues to do for those who love and follow Him.

GLORY

PHILIPPIANS 4:20

“Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

No matter how many times Paul refers to himself as the example to follow Paul understood that one thing and one thing alone was central - all glory must go to the Father. It was not through his own strength or character that Paul had anything to share. There was nothing for Paul to boast of even in his

own story of redemption. Paul knew that whatever wisdom he had learned, whatever training he had gained, whatever deeds he had accomplished, all that he had understood and done prior to His encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, was worthless in light of knowing Christ. Christ was all. And Paul willingly forsook everything to follow Him (Philippians 3:7-11).

The glory for Paul's contentment and the glory for enduring all things through the strength which God supplied goes to God and God alone. Paul was strengthened but not through his own will or strength of character. He was strengthened by the power of God which dwelt within him. So there was no need for Paul to receive any glory. It was through his dependence on God that Paul received strength and learned to be content; so Paul gives all glory to the One who supplied the strength, taught the lesson, and supplied the need.

GRACE

In his final remarks Paul closes his letter with these words, *'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.'* Paul desires the grace of God to penetrate into the spirit of those who belong to Him. Paul knew the grace of God was not designed to be solely understood by the mind. Rather it was designed so that the stony hearts of men could be turned into hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

He understood that the penetration of God's grace into the spirit of man is at the heart of salvation. If the grace of God does not penetrate the spirit of man then the will cannot surrender, trust in God cannot occur, true contentment cannot be known, and the strength which God supplies to endure life's struggles cannot be received.

Paul also knew that those who embrace grace in this life will live in grace in the next. That is why Paul closes his letter to the Philippians with these words, *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."* It is his wish that all would have their spirits penetrated by God's grace. Without it salvation is impossible. With it the promises of God become reality and those who seek refuge in Christ will find the eternal sanctuary of peace awaiting them in heaven.

Though there are many other things I could have brought out in our review of Philippians, I felt these were sufficient reminders of the main themes Paul was addressing; that the life he lived was lived as an example for us to follow (1 Corinthians 11:1); that forsaking all else he sought after Christ alone and in his seeking he found the righteousness that eluded him through the Law; that after striving for peace he found it in surrender to Jesus; and in his surrender he learned to be content in any and all circumstance and found the strength to endure through the One who strengthened him.

But what about you? Last week I asked you to bring your favorite verse or two from Philippians and what stood out to you over the course of our study. So now it's your turn. Tell me what you learned and what you thought was most important to you.

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