

# GOD WITH US

## Part 10: EARLY LETTERS

### Message 28 – Philippians Living as a Citizen of Heaven Philippians 3&4

#### Introduction

As we noted in our first lesson on Philippians, there was a problem with unity in the church. But the “problem beneath the problem” was one of FOCUS. Somehow, the Philippian believers had become more fixated on earthly relational problems and agendas than on their heavenly citizenship and their heavenly King. Paul’s primary purpose in this letter was to help them regain their focus on things above (2:5-8), so that their unity (2:1-4,14), might be restored and their witness to their world might be effective (2:15). From a Roman prison cell, Paul taught them by his words and by his example how to ‘live above’ the turmoil of this world. He taught them to desire to know Jesus more intimately (3:10), and let God work in their lives for their good, and for His good pleasure (2:13). May we take Paul’s admonitions to the people in Philippi to be our own.

#### 3:1-21 Running toward the Prize

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, Paul gives us great insight by his example, as to how to run the race toward a heavenly prize, “...*but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me*” (3:12). This heavenward race is life-long, while we are surrounded by deceptions and distractions that seek to get us off course. Paul’s writing here is heavily autobiographical. We are given insight into *how Paul lived out his faith in Christ*. This is a fabulous ‘perspective chapter’ that helps us learn how to live on this earth while being citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

#### - Beware of the deceivers: 3:1-4

This section moves in the opposite direction from the last, where Paul spoke about two outstanding examples in Timothy and Epaphroditus (ch.2). He contrasted them with the false teachers, the men who were out for selfish gain, who were distorting the gospel and trying to bring people into the bondage of the Jewish laws of Moses.

***“Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh – though I myself have reasons for such confidence” (3:2-4).***

The language here (‘mutilators of the flesh’) points to the Judaizers, those false teachers who were telling the Gentile (Greek and Roman) Christians that they needed to become Jewish (circumcised) and fully submit to the laws of Moses in order to be truly saved (the same group that troubled the Galatians; also see Acts 15). While other factions opposed Paul’s ministry and message, the Judaizers were his main opponents throughout the course of his ministry career.

### **- Paul’s own past as a legalistic Jew: 3:5-6**

Paul knew the teachings of the Judaizers because he used to hold a similar position with regard to “salvation by means of obedience to the laws of Moses.”

***“If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 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; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless” (3:5,6).***

Paul formerly excelled at being a “law-keeper,” even to the extent of being the lead persecutor of the first Christians (Acts 9:1,2). He was educated under Gamaliel, one of the leading Jewish rabbis in that day. But after Paul’s dramatic conversion (Acts 9:3-6), he had found a completely different type of ‘righteousness’ that comes from Christ living within, on the basis of faith, not on the basis of good works. Thus, he considered all of his former accomplishments to be rubbish (garbage, dung), compared to the wonderful surpassing gift of knowing true salvation in Christ.

### **- A righteousness that comes from Christ: 3:7-9**

As the famous British New Testament scholar, F. F. Bruce, put it, Paul became the “apostle of the heart set free.” He discovered the grace of God, brought to him through Christ. This grace became the center of Paul’s heart-beat, life and ministry.

***“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of***

*the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, 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 on the basis of faith” (3:7-9).*

In his letter to the Romans, Ch.7, Paul described his own struggle with the sin of “coveting.” In his heart he knew that his external, disciplined regime of trying to obey the laws of Moses did NOT keep him from breaking the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, “*You shall not covet*” (Deuteronomy 5:21). He knew he could not actually keep the law, before a Holy God, although according to human standards he was superior to most.

### **- Pressing on toward maturity in Christ: 3:10-16**

Coming to know the grace of God in Christ was the starting point; but Paul wanted to press on to maturity; he wanted to win the prize of the upward call of God on his life.

*“I want to know Christ – yes, and the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, 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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us, then, 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.” (3:10-16).*

Paul wanted to truly KNOW Christ, everything about His Lord in knowledge and experience. And, to live in fellowship with Christ to the maximum degree, even if that meant sharing in the sufferings of Christ very deeply. He knew that his persecution of believers in Jesus had caused them extreme suffering, so he was not afraid of experiencing the same kind of suffering His Lord had suffered, or that he personally had caused others to suffer.

Paul drew on the metaphor of the Roman athletic contests, saying that like them **“he pressed on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him” (3:12)**. Christ had “taken hold of him” to be a “light to the Gentiles” (Acts 9:15,16). He explained his life goal the last time he met with the Ephesian elders in a similar way:

**“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24).**

By **“attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”** Paul does *not* mean that he *hoped* to be resurrected someday (which was a certainty for him). Rather, he was talking about experiencing the **resurrection power of Jesus here and now**, in this life, as he went through experiences that were similar to the sufferings of Jesus. Elsewhere Paul speaks about the privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ (Philippians 1:25,26).

*If you wonder where our motto comes from – To Know Jesus and to Make Jesus Known – it’s passages like this one in Philippians 3. Paul first came to “know Jesus” at the point of salvation. But then he wanted to continue getting to “know Jesus” at deeper and deeper levels. All the while, he sought to “make Jesus known” through his life and words, so that other people could begin their spiritual journey with the Savior. In what ways are you seeking to know Jesus better? God has given you opportunities to make Jesus known to others. How have you taken advantage of them?*

### **- Following the right examples: 3:17-21**

For the Philippians, there were good examples to follow (like Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and others), but also bad examples. Paul had already warned of the dangerous teaching of the Judaizers (legalistic Jews). Now he further warned them of those who lived as **“enemies of the cross of Christ.”**

**“Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, 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” (3:17-21).***

The false teachers had “*their minds set on earthly things.*” Their own stomachs (appetites, desires, values) drove their agendas. Paul, on the other hand, lived as a “*citizen of heaven*” while here on earth. The Greek word “citizenship” is “***politeuma***”, from which we derive our word “politics.” Paul’s “political affiliation” was with the kingdom and King of heaven.

*In a democratic society like America, it is fitting for Christians to support individuals and parties that best reflect our beliefs and values. At the same time, it is unhealthy when we become more focused on earthly politics or positions and less focused on the values, strategies and purposes of the kingdom of heaven. The Philippian Jews, whose earthly ‘politics’ were the laws of Moses (even after Christ had come and fulfilled the Mosaic Law), were leading themselves and believers in Jesus off course. In our modern day, the “idolatry of politics” is deadly for believers and our unique Christian testimony. It is our privilege as American Christians, who are “citizens of the kingdom of heaven first,” to support one earthly political group or another, yet with humility and reverence for Christ. Thus, while engaging in earthly politics, we MUST remember that our “**politeuma**” is in heaven, and it is from heaven that we await our TRUE KING. HE alone can bring to this earth the kind of government that will ultimately satisfy us. Where do you find your allegiance being focused?*

### **Final Admonitions: 4:1-23**

#### **- Urging Unity between two Women: 4:1-3**

We are not told why Euodia and Syntyche were having trouble getting along; but perhaps this was part of the wider unity problem in Philippi. The fact that Paul singles them out seems to indicate that these were influential women in the church and that their differences were impacting the wider group.

***“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-***

**workers, whose names are in the book of life” (4:1-3).**

We must take note that it only takes a few people to disrupt unity and destroy God’s work. Ch.2:2 Paul admonishes the congregation to “make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” He was distraught that these 2 beloved friends of his were not able to resolve their differences. Jesus said that Satan is a thief and his goal is “to kill, steal and destroy” (John 10:10). He uses disunity to destroy relationships and churches. Paul pleaded for it to be resolved. Sometimes it takes a mediator, but no matter what, don’t give Satan a foothold to steal and destroy unity. We also should note that these 2 women were co-laborers at one time with Paul, and still his friends. Being associated with an influential leader comes with a responsibility to not distract from the leader’s impact through displaying a spirit of pride, and being argumentative, while being known as his or her friend.

**“The book of life” (4:3)** is referred to in several places and is also called ‘*the Lamb’s book of life*’ because it contains the names of those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, the ‘Lamb of God’. How can we be sure if our name is in the book of life? By believing in Jesus Christ’s death on the cross for my sins and receiving Him as Savior. In Revelation 3:5, Christ says that He will never blot out a person’s name from the book of life. No created thing can ever separate ourselves from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:37-39). No-one can snatch a sheep (true believer), out of Jesus’ and the Father’s hand (John 10:28-30).

#### **- Countering Anxiety with Prayer: 4:4-7**

There is more emphasis on joy and rejoicing in Philippians than in any other of Paul’s letters. Here he gives one key to a joyful walk with God: countering anxiety with prayer.

***“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (4:4-7).***

Notice the mention of *thanksgiving* woven in there. Thanksgiving is important in that it demonstrates not only *gratitude* that God bends low to hear our prayers, but also *trust*, that God *is at work in*

*answer to our prayers*, even when it may not *feel* like He is working. When we take our anxieties to the Lord in prayer, He promises to guard our hearts and minds with His peace. This is a powerful exchange that we all need – His peace in exchange for our anxiety – to reduce stress in our lives. His peace transcends all understanding. We may not understand the ‘whys’ and the ‘whats’ of our circumstances, but His supernatural peace is actually *above* what our mind can understand, and it will literally guard our mind from fear and worry.

#### **- Thinking noble thoughts: 4:8**

***“Finally, brothers and sisters, 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” (4:8).***

Paul often emphasized the role of the *mind* in our walk with Christ (see also Rom. 8:5-13, Col.3:2, Eph.4:23). There were some in Philippi who were setting their mind on earthly things (3:19); but such thinking would never produce the unity and peace fitting for the body of Christ.

*What shapes your thoughts? If we are going to think noble thoughts, then we must draw on noble sources for those thoughts. This is why it is important to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). This is a daily choice – to tune our minds to heaven’s voice and to tune out the ignoble chatter of this world. Make no mistake about it: What we give our minds to will shape our attitudes, anxieties and actions. “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).*

#### **- Paul models discipleship: 4:9**

Discipleship comes from the root word ‘disciple’- a learner or a follower. Discipleship involves learning, receiving, hearing and seeing from a more mature follower of Christ. Paul encouraged the believers to put into practice the things they learned, received, heard or saw lived out by him.

***“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (4:9).***

***“Join with others in following my example, brethren take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you” (3:17).***

We all should be either encouraging a newer believer to follow and learn from us, or we should be learning from a more mature believer. This is the pattern set forth throughout the entire Bible. Jesus began His earthly ministry by inviting certain men to “Come, follow Me” (John 2:43; Matt.4:19). Who are you pouring your life into? Who are your “spiritual children,” your “disciples?” And who is pouring into you? Who are you being disciplined by?

**- Paul models contentment: 4:10-13**

Paul had many tangible needs while in prison and the Philippians had been faithful in helping to meet those needs. Yet, beyond his needs being met, he wanted them to know that he had learned *the secret* of being content in any set of circumstances.

***“I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength” (4:10-13).***

Jesus spoke about contentment in Matthew 6:23-34. The “secret” to contentment is 1) realizing that our Father in heaven knows exactly what we really need, and 2) trusting Him to meet those needs according to His timing and wisdom. Is there a situation in your life right now where you need to “learn the secret” of contentment? Another aspect of contentment is realizing that many of the things we think we “need” are things that, in reality, we “desire” or “want”, but do not “need.” What things in your life are desires, not needs? Are you learning to be content even though you aren’t enjoying what you desire?

**- Paul thanks them for their gifts: 4:14-20**

The Philippian church was a “participating” church from the first day onwards (see 1:5 where Paul acknowledged this right up front). Lydia was the first example in Philippi of one who instantly participated “*from the first day*” when the new church was being



planted. She urged and persuaded Paul and the team to stay at her home and use her home for the start-up church (Acts 16). From that day forward they were not content to sit on the sidelines and watch other people do the work. They wanted to have a share in the action, and they accomplished that not only by their own local ministry in Philippi, but also by supporting the wider mission work of Paul and his team. Paul commended them for their faithfulness over the years.

***“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 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; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. 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. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (4:14-20).***

Oak Pointe Church has had a vital Missions Department from the very beginning. This is an important way that you can participate in the mission of our church in the wider world. Whether you go on a mission trip with a team, or support missionaries with your prayers and financial gifts, you are following in the footsteps of the Philippian church that “shared with Paul in the matter of giving and receiving.” Take some time to talk with our Missions Department so that you can get to know our missions work and participate more fully.

**- Final words and Benediction: 4:21-23**

***“Greet all God’s people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen” (4:21-23).***

How fitting that Paul included greetings from “those who belong to Caesar’s household.” He was leading people in the highest spheres of Roman life to faith in Christ. Knowing Jesus and making Jesus known. That was what Paul was all about!

## Discussion Questions

1. Chapters 3 and 4 present so many practical topics. Review the notes and choose some topics that you are challenged to grow in. Write down or discuss why you chose them.
2. Describe a way (or ways) that you have experienced growing to KNOW Christ more intimately? (3:10) Or, describe how you feel stuck in your journey of growing to know Christ more.
3. Have you experienced suffering because of your belief in Christ? If so, what was your experience? *“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him” (1:29).*
4. Have you experienced fear and anxiety and then talked (prayed) to God about it (4:5-7) giving thanks, and then felt a supernatural peace even when you couldn’t understand the ‘whys’ and the ‘whats’?
5. How would you describe the difference between “JOY” and “happiness”? Do you find it easy or hard to “REJOICE” when things aren’t going so well? “Joy” or “Rejoice” occurs 17 times in this short letter (you can read through and locate the references.) Paul was in prison. What do you think was his secret to experiencing such joy?