



SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

13 WEEKS IN PHILIPPIANS

Notes, Quotes, and Discussion Guide for
Individual or Small Group Studies

Living and Active

BY BRANDON MOORE



Authors Notes

In a time of major transition in our lives, my wife, Kim, and I began weekly study of Philippians. We had spent ten years running as fast as we could successful in our careers and investments. We bought what we thought was our dream house overlooking the mountains and lake. During this time we welcomed two beautiful children, Maddie and Jax. Despite having everything we wanted, we had so little joy. As God intends for them to do sometimes, things fell apart. We both knew at this point we were chasing the wrong things. It was here that we found Paul's magnificent letter to the church in Philippi. We learned the secret of being content is found only in Christ-likeness. May your journey through Philippians be as slow and joyful as ours.

Brandon Moore

READING LAYOUT

Week 1 - 1:1-4:23

Week 2 – 1:1-11

Week 3 – 1:12-26

Week 4 – 1:27-30

Week 5 – 2:1-4

Week 6 – 2:5-11

Week 7 – 2:12-18

Week 8 – 2:19-29

Week 9 – 3:1-9

Week 10 – 3:10-16

Week 11 – 4:1-7

Week 12 – 4:8-13

Week 13 – 4:14-23

To my joy, Kimberly Joy. Thank you for joy, laughter, and simplicity. Thank you for all the time you give me to write. Thank you most of all for our children. May the contentment of our marriage be found in Christ, together.

Introduction

A package arrived on my porch this evening. We had friends over for dinner and in the midst of the meal with the bustle of our kids back and forth from their playroom to our dinner table, there was a nearly unnoticed knock on the door. As we said goodbye after being filled with tortellini soup, blackberry cobbler, and incautious laughter, we noticed the small package with a crooked smile printed across the package. The contrast confronted me instantly. I didn't even remember what we had ordered.

Something we had to have I'm sure.

Something we couldn't live without.

Something to make us smile.

Something to fulfill us.

Something I had either spent hours scrolling through the countless options to perfectly find or...

Something I had searched quick on my way to work and hit "buy with one click."

There is the old joke about the old, wise fish that swims past two young fish headed the other direction. He nods his chin and says, "Good morning boys... how's the water?" As the young fish swim on by one says to the other, "What the heck is water?"

For Americans, consumerism is the water we swim in. It is so influential and effective in guiding our thoughts, lives, and happiness that we do not even notice it nor for many of us even realize it exists. The author John McKnight describes a consumer society well, "The essential promise of a consumer society is that satisfaction can be purchased." (John McKnight, *The Abundant Community*, 9). Innate the core make up of living in a consumer society is discontentment.

We are discontent with what we have, so we must purchase what will make us happy only to find that this happiness is fleeting. This discontentment is not reserved simply to our p

This has been done to our society intentionally through marketing dating back to the early 1900's. Charles Kettering, who was the director of General Motors Research Laboratory wrote an article in 1929 just months before the stock market crashed. In it he says among other things:

“Prosperity has nothing to do with dollars in the bank or with bank clearances. Prosperity is measured by the tonnage of useful materials going through the channels of trade. This is what make prosperity. This is what makes busy workshops and busy railroads. This is what makes everybody happy...”

“If everyone were satisfied, no one would buy the new thing because no one would want it... you must accept this reasonable dissatisfaction with what you have and buy the new thing or accept hard times. You can have your choice.”

This choice might have been available still in the 1920's but a hundred years later it appears such a dominant force in our culture, that we are left without any choice. Or are we?

In Paul's magnificent letter to the Philippians, he lays out from start to finish a perspective on Godly contentment. Despite his imprisonment, he feels no “reasonable dissatisfaction.” Rather, he claims “I have found the secret of being content.” What is this secret?

Parsed and spliced from the context it seems simple, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

Sweet.

Easy enough.

Hashtag it.

Tattoo it.

Call it done.

This quote comes from the final chapter of Philippians and serves as the pinnacle of all that Paul has been building upon throughout the entire letter. Paul receives a gift from the church in Philippi through Epaphroditus. They are worried about Paul and how he is doing. Paul takes this inquiry and flips it on its head. Rather than simply respond with a quick “Doing fine. Prison stinks, but I'll make it through.” He reverses the entire point of their

inquiry. Their inquiry into his well-being, though kind, demonstrates their spiritual immaturity. Paul uses the opportunity to remind them that a Christians well-being, their satisfaction and contentment is never related to their present circumstances. Instead, it comes from “knowing Christ and being found in him.” The secret of being content is to cast off all socially adorned or genetically predisposed markers of identity and be exclusively wrapped up in Christ’s identity.

The secret is not a one liner but a whole lifer.

To be content is to be found in Christ. All other pursuits for contentment are circumstantial and vain.

Those who are found in Christ know contentment regardless of their circumstances. They know it can’t be purchased or shipped for free. The only “reasonable dissatisfaction” a Christian has is the longing to grow further into Christ and for him to redeem all things, making them new.

I hope that as you move through this guide, you will find practical, tangible ways to be found exclusively in Christ.

During most of the writing of this guide, I spent my evening remodeling our home. We redid the kitchen, living room, dining room, hallways, half-bath, and den. Remodeling a home is hard, slow, beautiful work. Somedays it took fixing plumbing while many other days it was just trying to get a piece of trim to fit where it belonged. There was sanding, painting, and sealing. No matter what different task it entailed each moved us closer towards what we wanted it to look like.

It is the same with being found in Christ. Everyday calls for something slightly different. Whether it is a characteristic in our core that the Holy Spirit works on during that season in our life or the tedious task of another day of laundry in service to the family. Slowly through the years of faithfulness, Christ is increasing formed as our exclusively identity.

It is a hard, slow, beautiful work that God is doing in us. And you can be confident of this:

“That he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 1:6

How to Use this Resource

I don't know if there is any book in the bible that gets as spliced and quoted as Philippians. Whether it be "to live is Christ and to die is gain" in chapter one or "I press on toward the goal of the prize" in chapter three. Philippians seems to be cut into bite size nuggets and consumed as an appetizer. Yet, like any appetizer, it might be yummy to munch on but will inevitable leave us hungry for more.

Instead, I suggest we consume Philippians as one full meal. Thus, the first week's reading will cover the entire letter in one setting and the notes will correspond to this. I think the reader will be surprised at the rich flavor and abundant fullness that comes through reading Philippians this way.

1. Read the text! Before reading the notes, spend serious time engaging on your own with the word for that week. Each week's text is listed in the upper right corner.
2. Consider the notes as a helpful guide through the text rather than a commentary on the text. The goal is not to tell you what the text says but to allow the living and active Word of God to crystalize in your own thoughts.
3. The front page of the notes each week will have an introduction, devotional thought, and thoughts for the non-believer. The introduction is a broad view of the text in a precise paragraph. The devotional thoughts aren't intended to be deep or profound but encouraging, convicting, or thought-provoking. The notes for the non-believer are not actually for non-believers but for us as Christians to think about how this week's text might be helpful in sharing our faith with non-believers.
4. The back page of the notes will begin to dig deeper into the text for that week. This section will cover major themes of the letter and the background or context for the letter. Each week the bottom section called "text notes" will provide brief word studies on certain Greek words. Also, each week there will be an interesting quote from some author on that week's passage.
5. It is *vita*/that we study the Word of God alongside others. The discussion guide is where the thoughts begin to hit practice and transformation. In a small group we grow together in Christlikeness. These studies work best when they are used alongside weekly group meetings.
6. At the bottom of the discussion guide, we have included a Practicing Philippians section. This section will ask the reader to incorporate some dimension of the study into a practical action.

Acknowledgments

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Bibliography

The following resources were used extensively in my research. Their value and insight cannot be overstated.

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Notes & Quotes

Philippians 1:1-4:23

Devotional

Often lost in the way we read and approach scripture today is the original intent, genre, and structure of the scripture that we are reading. For example, when we read our daily Bible reading on an app or email it tends to be a few verses pulled from somewhere in scripture and placed as an independent thought before us. Yet, all scripture has an original audience and context. As we begin to study Philippians we need to hear it new and fresh by actually hearing it like it would have been originally heard. I want to encourage you to read the entire letter in one setting. It shouldn't take more than twenty minutes or so. Try and imagine receiving it as a letter from your spiritual mentor, Paul the Apostle. Imagine you knew him well. Maybe you were converted to The Way through his preaching in the synagogue. Maybe you met him outside of town in that quiet place of prayer and he stayed the rest of his time at your house. Imagine hearing the letter alongside fellow Christians in the midst of busy lives. Even further, imagine hearing it in the midst of a life that has been turned upside by the good news that a Jewish teacher named Jesus had been resurrected from the dead by God. Try and hear it in it's ancient context, and hopefully, hear it new.

Introduction

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians for four main reasons. First, he wrote to thank the church for their financial support of his ministry while he remained in prison (4:10-14). According to Acts 16:11-16 Paul helped establish the church in Philippi during his second missionary journey and they had continued to support him financially after his departure (Phil 4:15-20; 2 Cor 11:7-9). Second, he wrote the letter to send in support of Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus was a delegate from the church in Philippi who brought the financial gift to Paul from Philippi but then had become deathly ill upon arriving. Having now recovered, Paul sends him back with the letter (2:25-30). Third, Paul wrote the letter to inform the church that he was doing well even in his imprisonment (1:12-26; 4:10-19). Finally, Paul could not miss the opportunity to encourage the church in joy and unity. He specifically addresses a schism in the church between two of the leading ladies, Euodia and Syntyche (4:2).

Non-Believer

In each week of the notes there will be a brief section that explores how that week's text might be relevant for a non-believer. The idea is not that non-believer's will be reading these notes (though that would be awesome!), but that we should think about how Paul's letter helps us engage with non-believers. For example, by understanding Philippians as a letter from Paul to the church, we can talk to non-believers about the diverse testimony of scripture that covers everything from songs to letters and poetry to prose. Scripture is diverse because God longs to communicate with us in a variety of ways!

Memory Verse:

"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."

4:12-13

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Background

Paul writes to the church in Philippi. Philippi was located near the northern most tip of the Aegean Sea in Macedonia (modern Greece). It was established in 368 BC by Philip II of Macedonia, but gained great Roman status under Octavian in 31 BC. Octavian rebuilt the city as a military hub for the Roman empire and populated it with former soldiers (see Quotable below). The city was primarily composed of Romans but also held a scattering of Greeks. Outside of Acts 16 there is no historical record of a Jewish population or synagogue. After receiving the Macedonian call in Acts 16:6-10, Paul and his companions leave Asia Minor and crosses the Aegean Sea to Samothrace, Neapolis, and, finally, Philippi. During their time in Philippi they go outside the city to a “place of prayer,” which refers either to the place where Jews met together in Philippi or simply a common place for prayer. In either case they convert a leading lady of the city, Lydia, who was a Greek “God-fearer.” In the Jewish faith a God-fearer was a person who believed in God but was not born Jewish. Paul and his companions spend the rest of their time in Philippi staying with Lydia where they establish the first house church in Macedonia. Paul and Silas are later thrown into prison in Philippi after starting a riot by casting a demon out of a young woman. While in prison through a miraculous series of events, they convert the jailer and appear to establish another church in his home. Finally, they are released from prison and leave the city. For the full story read Acts 16:11-40.

Friendly Letter

The NT scholar David DeSilva point out that *Philippians* remarkably resembles a common ancient style of letter referred to as a friendly letter.² A friendly letter contains four common themes: There are four common themes in friendship letters as displayed in this text:

1. The absence and how the writer has not forgotten them.
2. The assurance of the authors concern for them and how he has helped their interests.
3. Assurance of the author that the recipients are genuinely concerned for the author.
4. Request for assistance and the desire to hear from them.

Paul hits all of these points in his letter to the Philippians:

1. Paul reminds the church of how much he misses them and how he keeps them close in prayer and mind. (1:3-4; 8-11; 27; 2:12, 24).
2. Paul shows his concern for the affairs of the Philippians, and how he is working to help them grow as Christians (2:19; 1:25-26).
3. The evidence of the Philippians dearness for Paul (1:7) is evident in their gift giving (4:14) and in Paul’s openness to share his current standing (1:12-26).
4. Paul requests that the Philippians help him by retaining joy and harmony (2:1-4; 4:4) and making his joy complete (2:2). Likewise he asks them to take care of the problems of his household in Eudia and Syntyche (4:2-3).

Text Notes

Every week there will be short, accessible notes on an important semantic or grammatical word in that week’s reading. For example:

1:4 - “joy” (Gk. Karas). Within the first four verses of the letter Paul touches on one of his key themes for the rest of the letter.

¹ Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians: A Two Horizons Commentary*, Kindle Location 203.

² David DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 653.

Quotable

Philippi was granted Italian legal status, exempting its colonists from various taxes and granting them citizenship and various land rights and privileges. Agriculture dominated the economy. Trade, which had a way of diffusing power in the Roman world because it demanded interaction and cooperation across ethnic groups, played a limited role in Philippi. As a result, Romans and Roman institutions exercised an unusual amount of influence. This would have included Roman religious institutions and the emperor cult in particular. In addition, a variety of other official cults seem to have been represented in Philippi as well as more popular religious movements.

Stephen E. Fowl¹

Discussion Guide

Philippians 1:1-4:23

Opening Question

Have you ever received a memorable letter? What was it?

Read Philippians 1:1-4:23.

Reading and Discipleship Questions

Most weeks we will have two to four reading and discipleship questions for small groups to use for discussion. This week as a group read the entire letter of Philippians and afterwards answer the following two questions:

When you read Philippians, what themes stick out to you?

How does it change your perspective to read Philippians in one sitting as a letter?

Practical Philippians

Write a letter of gratitude to one of your friends or member of your church family.

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 1:1-11

Devotional

In Luke 14:28-30 Jesus says, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’” Of course, Jesus is talking about the cost of discipleship. Before a person should commit to being Jesus’s disciple that person should weigh the cost and find it worthy. Yet, I have been thinking of this parable in light of this week’s passage. Paul says in 1:6, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.” God has weighed the cost for you. It is not lacking. He has enough to build his tower, to finish his work in you. You are, in fact, worth the cost of the blood and death of his only Son. So often in our discipleship we feel abandoned, like a half finished tower. We wonder why God would allow this or that to happen to us. We wonder if God still cares about us. If we are honest we probably even wonder if he’s doing anything with us at all in these monotonous days. Remember this, God’s not done with you. He has weighed the cost and found you worthy of completion.

Introduction

Paul begins his magnificent letter to the Philippians with two of the same themes that will follow throughout the letter: gratitude and joy. “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy” (v. 3-4). It was standard practice in the Greco-Roman culture to begin a letter with a word of gratitude. For Paul this gratitude before God is centered in his love for the saints in Philippi. It has been pointed out that Paul rarely, ever if, thanks the Lord for things or possessions. Instead, nearly all of his prayers of gratitude are for the abundant goodness of God and for the character and virtue of other Christians! Paul is joyful and grateful for the people that have been put in his life. This joy sustains him in prison and compels him to continue sharing the good news.

Non-Believer

It seems audacious and arrogant in contemporary culture to refer to ourselves or other Christians as “saints.” Yet, that is one of Paul’s primary titles for Christians. He says in 1:1, “To all God’s holy people” (NIV) or in the ESV, “to all the saints.” Do we throw out this designation in our attempts to be better received by current culture? In doing so, might we also lose something about our nature as Christians? Maybe a better approach is to understand why it is we are called “saints.” Paul uses this term as it points back to the OT designation of God’s chosen people (Ex. 19:6; 23:22). Often this term is heard as meaning morally superior, “holier than thou,” but it really just denotes being a part of God’s people. Are we saints because we are morally superior? Of course not! We are saints because God has graciously brought us into his kingdom. Of all people God’s saints should promote his grace and love as an invitation into a new life of sainthood for all people!

Memory Verse:

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

1:6

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Setting

Scholars are in agreement that the Apostle Paul is the author of this letter to the church in Philippi. That has been the traditional position since the second century and continues today. What is in question is Paul's location when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. We know three specific things about his location. First, he is in prison of some kind (1:7, et al.) Second, he is within a short period of travel from Philippi (2:25-30; This is not short travel as we know it today, but there appears to be enough time for two trips between Paul's initial hearing from the Philippians and his writing back. This had to have taken place over a matter of weeks as he is in prison the entire time. Long distance travel in the Greco-Roman world often took months or, even, years. Finally, we know that Paul is located in a place where there are members of Caesar's household (4:22). The traditional and most widely held view is that Paul is writing from his Roman imprisonment. Yet, two other theories have recently gained traction: Caesarea or Corinth. Both were geographically closer to Philippi, might have held Pauline imprisonment, and were Roman political hubs.

Partners in the Gospel

In nearly all of his letters, Paul offers thanks for the churches he is writing too. Yet, in Philippians Paul uniquely thanks the church in Philippi for their "partnership in the Gospel" (1:5). This might be an allusion to the financial gift and ongoing financial support that the Philippians continue to offer Paul (4:15). Similar thankfulness about the financial relationships between Paul and individual churches exists in his correspondence with the Romans and Corinthians (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor 9:13). Yet, the language Paul uses in 1:5 is especially interesting. Literally, he says "your fellowship in the good news." Paul uses this word fellowship, the famous Christian word "koinonia," three times in Philippians. In 2:1 the fellowship is of the Spirit and in 3:10 the fellowship is in Christ's suffering. This is no dinner club or golf outing, Paul understands that to be a Christian is to be deeply engaged in the fellowship of proclaiming the good news in unity of the Spirit, which entails sharing in Christ's suffering. The Philippian fellowship is not just financial support, it is Christ centered participation in his entire ministry "from the first day until now" (1:5).

Quotable

"We would expect knowledge to lead to love, but Paul puts it the other way around. It is their response to the love of Christ for them that will give them the right knowledge."

Carolyn Osiek¹

Timothy

As in many of Paul's letters, Timothy is listed as a co-author (Col 1:1, 1 Th 1:1, et al.) Timothy was a resident of Lystra whose father was Greek and mother was a Jew (Acts 16:1). He was a common traveling partner with Paul and went on to become one of Paul's most trusted fellow ministers. In other letters where Timothy is listed as a co-author Paul writes in the plural voice, but in this letter Paul primarily speaks in the singular voice suggesting Timothy might not actually be present for the writing of the letter. He is likely attributed authorship as the letter carrier.

Text Notes

1:1 - "servants," "oversees and deacons" (Gk. *Doulos*, *episkopoi*, *diakonois*). Much ink has been spilt over the interpretation of these three words. In their most basic form they can be translated "slaves, overseers, and ministers." Do these refer to formally held offices in the early church or broad categories of Christian service? It is important to not read contemporary positions into Paul's letter.

1:10 - "discern" (Gk. *Dokimazo*). Literally, "prove, tried, tested." This is a word often used to determine the quality of metals, to test and see if they are genuine.

1:10 - "day of Christ," (eis emeran *Xristou*). This phrase alludes to the OT expression "day of the Lord." Paul is not alluding to an ethereal, disembodied existence, but to the promised return of the resurrected Lord.

¹ Carolyn Osiek, *Philippians*, 37.

Discussion Guide

Philippians 1:1-11

Opening Question

What day to day task do you have difficulty finishing?

Read Philippians 1:1-11.

Reading Questions

How would you describe the relationship that Paul has with the church in Philippi?

What sticks out to you about Paul's prayer for the Philippians?

What is the connection or correlation between love and knowledge in these opening verses?

Discipleship Questions

In your spiritual life, how do joy and thanksgiving go together?

Are you a partner in the Gospel? Why or why not?

What virtue or quality do you think God is working in you currently?

Practical Philippians

Practice Gratitude for your church! Working through a directory or your own memory, offer a prayer of thanksgiving for as many people in your church that you can. These aren't petitions for health, healing, or otherwise, but simple prayers thanking God for these people in your life.

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 1:12-26

Introduction

"I want you to know..." (1:12). Paul moves into the main body and overarching purpose of this letter with this phrase. Though Paul is writing to thank the Philippians for their financial gift, more importantly he is updating them on his present circumstances. The Church in Philippi knows that Paul has been imprisoned for sharing the Gospel. They probably recall his imprisonment in Philippi before he left town. They care deeply about him. You can almost hear them talking: "Has Paul gotten himself in too deep this time?" "I wonder if there is anyone bringing him dinners." "They'll let him rot in there if he's not careful." What does Paul want his brothers and sisters in Christ to know about his present circumstances? With rhetorical mastery, Paul not only moves to reframe his own circumstances in light of the Gospel, which is the main point of this section (1:12-27), but he also wants the Philippians to reframe the way they see their own circumstances (1:27-30). He does this in three ways. First, he shares that despite his imprisonment, the Good News is still being "advanced" even into those who are responsible for his imprisonment, "the whole palace guard" (v. 12-13). Second, his imprisonment has directly *caused* brothers and sisters to "become more confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear (see text note). Finally, Paul earnestly believes that everything that has happened is for his "deliverance" (v. 19).

Non-Believer

Our circumstances should not dictate our joy. In the history of the church, from Acts through today, one of the greatest ways Christians have testified to the good news of Jesus is by living out joy in the midst of terrible circumstances. Our joy is eternal as the resurrection of Jesus reminds us, our present circumstances are not as the cross likewise reminds us.

Devotional

While in prison, Paul dramatically portrays his present circumstances to the Philippians. Though he is joyful, he is also exhausted from his imprisonment. You can imagine the words of Bilbo in Lord of the Rings coming from Paul, "I feel thin... sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread." Paul's zealous, missional living out of the Gospel has led him from farm villages to port cities. He has known the dangerous voyage across the tumultuous seas of the Roman world far to many times. Chains and bars have been his constant traveling companions. The guilt of his previous life and concern for his beloved churches weigh constant on his mind. There are days he longs for the relief of death. It's from this place of tension that Paul provides Christlike perspective, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (v. 21). Paul doesn't want to go on living to enjoy his stockpile of wealth or see places he's never been before. He doesn't want to continue living so that he can enjoy his well deserved retirement. He doesn't want to continue living because he's scared of death. Paul wants to live so that he can continue the ministry of the Gospel. He says specifically that living means "fruitful labor" (v. 22). Why should we go on living? What defines our life in the body?

Memory Verse:

The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

1:18

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Deliverance

Paul contends that all the things that have happened to him are not only for the promotion of the Gospel, but also for his own “deliverance” (Gk. *Soteria*, v. 19). What does this mean? Commonly, Paul uses this word “salvation,” to refer to eternal salvation (1 Thes 5:8-9, et al). Even within Philippians this is his common usage (1:19; 28; 2:12). Yet, it seems odd that Paul would suggest that his own sufferings would result in his salvation. The background to this phrase might be useful. Paul is quoting verbatim from Job 13:16 from the LXX (Septuagint, Greek translation of the Hebrew OT). In the midst of his innocent suffering, Job says, “Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance.” Scholars debate how intentional Paul’s quotation might be, but it does seem Paul understands his suffering in the same way Job does. Job is petitioning a trial, which he believes will turn out for his deliverance. It appears Paul is using this phrase in the same way. He understands that his trial will prove his innocence and lead to his deliverance from prison.

Envy and Strife

Paul notes that the Philippians were familiar with opposing missionaries who preach out of “envy and rivalry... selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing they can stir up trouble” for him. Scholars are divided as to who these opposing preacher might be. Some have argued that they are the Judaizers, who are arguing that Gentiles must first becomes Jews before they can become Christian. Still Paul doesn’t appear to address the issue of Judaizers elsewhere in the letter and there wasn’t a strong Jewish population in Philippi to begin with. Another option is that these preachers are simply Paul personal opponents. It was common in Greco-Roman culture for famous preachers and rhetoricians to have opponents who would come and offer their critique for the right price. It appears that these opponents have attempted to take advantage of Paul’s imprisonment to strengthen their own position. Rather than rebuking his opponents, Paul takes the Godly approach of rejoicing that Christ is being proclaimed.

Progress

Paul bookends this brief section in v. 12 and v. 25 with the word furtherance or progress (Gk. *Prokope*). This word means to advance or go forwards. Paul understands that his chains are both for the advancement of the Good News and the advancement of faith in the lives of the Philippians. Paul knows God is advancing the Gospel through his circumstances.

Text Notes

1:13 - “As a result” (Gk. *hoste*). Literally, “that, therefore, so then,” etc. This short connecting word is vital to understanding what Paul is arguing. “*Hoste*” is extremely common and can be used in a variety of ways, but here scholars are in agreement that it is used *causally*. Thus, Paul’s imprisonment has *caused* the Gospel to advance.

1:13 - “palace guard” (Gk. *praitorion*). Literally, “judgment hall,” palace,” *praetorium*.” This word is commonly used in the Roman world to refer to either the headquarters of a Roman camp or a palace in which the Roman governor resides. In the NT it used to refer to Herod and Pilates judgement hall (Acts 23:35; John 18:28; 33; 19:9). It has been demonstrated that in Rome the term *praetorium* nearly always referred to an elite Roman guard of soldiers.

1:10 - “gain,” (Gk *kerdos*). This accounting word means something added as a credit or profit. It is only used three times in the NT (Tit 1:11) with two of those occurrences being in Philippians (1:21; 3:7).

Quotable

“In 1:12 Paul, rather conventionally, began to make known the disposition of his own circumstances... It turns out, however, that these things are only indirectly about Paul. Clearly, here, as in many other places in the epistles, Paul and his story are integrated so thoroughly into the story of Christ that it becomes difficult to separate the two. Paul has learned to see that his circumstances are part of this larger ongoing story. Hence, in talking about himself he quite naturally ends up talking about the progress of that story. If one sees the aim of the life of discipleship as growing into ever deeper communion with the triune God and with others, then one of the things that contemporary Christians can learn from Paul is this habit of being able to narrate the story both of one’s past and one’s present circumstances from the perspective of those who have learned their place in Christ’s ongoing story.”

¹ Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians: A Two Horizons Commentary*, Kindle Location 564.

Discussion Guide

Philippians 1:12-26

Opening Question

Have you ever been in trouble with the law?

Read Philippians 1:12-26.

Reading Questions

How does Paul flip the idea of imprisonment on its head in this passage?

What are the main differences between Paul and his opponents according to this passage?

How would you describe Paul's relationship with life and death?

Discipleship Questions

Paul uses the phrase "progress... in the faith." What does it mean in our lives to progress in the faith?

In what ways does your struggle with life and death relate and differ to Paul's?

How can we exalt Christ in our bodies?

Practical Philippians

Visit a jail this week. Maybe go in or just park in the parking lot. Take time to read this section of Philippians while at the jail. Try and place yourself on the inside without the ability to walk or talk freely. Ask yourself seriously, would you do this for the sake of Christ?

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 1:27-30

Introduction

Paul spent the opening and thanksgiving of the letter updating the Philippian church on his present circumstances. Despite his imprisonment and opponents, he is in a good place because he knows that the Gospel is being advanced. Right off the bat, Paul has attempted to reframe the Philippian Churches understanding of his plight through the good news of Jesus. He says that the good news has been shared among the ones imprisoning him and that he knows "what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance" (1:19). Yet, Paul's goal is not only to reframe his own context through the Gospel but, more importantly, to help the Philippian church reframe their own context through the gospel. He first hints at this in 1:6, "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion," 1:7, "all of you share in God's grace with me," and 1:19, "I know that through *your* prayers and God's provision." Paul builds on these hints with his plea for the Philippian Church in 1:27, "*Whatever happens*, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." Whatever the present context, the Philippians are called to reframe their circumstances through the "gospel of Christ." This will be Paul's main point through the rest of the letter.

Non-Believer

Out of nowhere I received a message from the estranged father of two boys I had been mentoring, "I've been reading my NT and decided I want to get baptized. I've always thought you lived what you preached and admired that. Will you baptize me?" It had been at least five years since I had seen this man, but when the Spirit convicted his heart he reached out to me. Because I'm perfect? NO WAY! Because I'm a preacher? Not so much. Why? Because I lived what I preached. Paul tells the Philippians, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel." Some times the best way we share the good news is simply to live worthy.

Devotional

"It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him," (1:29). So says the guy trapped in prison. The guy locked away, or at least under some form of house arrest, encourages the church in Philippi that it has been granted to them that they will get to suffer for Christ. Are we missing out on something? Paul is relentless in his understanding of Christian maturity or what he calls Christlikeness. Time and time again he says that being like Christ requires suffering. It is not that you *have* to suffer. It is not that you *might* suffer. It is not that you *bear through* suffering. It is that you *have been granted* to suffer with Christ. This word translated "granted" also means "given" or "given graciously." It is related to the word we translate "grace" in the NT. Paul tells the church in Philippi that suffering is a graciously given gift. We live in a culture that avoids suffering at all costs. We pop a pill when we hurt. One survey showed Americans spent 740 million dollars on pillows in just 2010 and that numbers is estimated to have risen dramatically since then. All for what? Comfort. The pursuit of comfort has produced a comfortable faith. Yet, Paul says suffering leads to Christlikeness. What am I missing out on?

Memory Verse:

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

1:27

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Conduct Yourselves

In 1954 the scholar Raymond R. Brewer wrote an influential article on Phil 1:27 concerning the word *politeuo*, which is translated “conduct yourself” (NIV), “live” (HCSB), “let your manner of life” (ESV). He explored the background and common usage of the word to demonstrate two things. First, that this word and related word group is not Paul’s common way of talking about Christian living. Seventeen times a piece in his letters Paul says to walk or live as Christians. This is his most common description of Christian living. Yet, as Brewer showed, Paul uses the word *politeuo* and its related form *politeuma* once a piece in Philippians 1:27; 3:20 *and no where else in any of his letters!* Second, Brewer demonstrates that this word is often used to describe how a person was expected to live as a citizen of the Roman empire. He concludes, “The occurrence in these Philippian passages of [*politeuo*]... hardly seems to be either accidental or incidental... they seem to be chosen deliberately and for a good reason. Paul seems to have employed these words to say, ‘Continue to discharge your obligations as citizens and residents of Philippi faithfully and as a Christian should; but do not yield to the patriotic pressure to give to Nero that which belongs to Christ alone. Remember that while you are members of a Roman colony you are also a colony of heaven from which you are awaiting the return of your divine Lord and Savior.”¹

Opposition

Last week’s notes explored who Paul’s opponents might be based on what little is known about them from this letter. There is even less known about the Philippians opponents referred to in 1:28. Though it is possible these are the same opponents, that seems unlikely based on Paul’s description of his opponents in 1:15-18. Also, it is unclear whether these are the same opponents described in 3:18-19. What we do know is that the opponents are able to do harm based on the reference to suffering (1:29), that they are frightening (1:28), and that they appear to be outside of the Christian community (1:28). Likewise, it seems apparent from the text that the Christians in Philippi are suffering on behalf of their allegiance to the gospel.

Quotable

I have a great concern about evangelism. The very nature of the gospel is that it is to be communicated and shared. But I don't think the gospel is ever going to be very popular. It never has been and it never will be. If we live the Christian faith right, it will not result in full and overflowing churches. There is just no evidence for that any place in scripture or history. If we determine successful evangelism by how many people we bring into the church, then we've got it screwed up from the start. What we have to do is make sure that we are being personal and energetic about sharing our faith - but also being honest. And I think honesty is the hard part.

Eugene Peterson²

Whatever Happens

Paul moves from self-reflection towards an assertion for the Philippian church with the phrase, “whatever happens,” (1:27, NIV). This is the translation of the single word *monon*. This word means “only” or “alone,” but in this present context it takes on a different understanding. The ESV and NASB use “only” while the HCSB uses “just one thing.” The idea is that the Philippians should be singularly focused on one thing alone: living worthy of the gospel. Fowl’s translation in his commentary carries the idea well, “Do this one thing: Order your common life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”²

Text Notes

1:27 - “Spirit” (Gk. *pneuma*). Scholars disagree with what Paul means by *Pneuma*, “spirit,” in this context. It can either be with a capitalized ‘S’ as in the Spirit of God or a lowercase ‘s’ meaning common cause. It might be an intentional play on words for Paul in this case where the Philippian Christians should stand firm in one Spirit meaning both that they are standing together in the Spirit of Christ.

1:10 - “faith of the Gospel” (Gk *pistei tou euangellion*). Paul could mean faith created by the gospel, faith in the gospel or, even, faith that actually is the gospel.

¹ Raymond R. Brewer, “The Meaning of *Politeusthe* in Philippians” *JBL* 73:2 (1954), 76-83.

² Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality*, Kindle location 2792.

Discussion Guide

Philippians 1:27-30

Opening Question

What's the farthest you've ever been from "home?"

Read Philippians 1:27-30.

Reading Questions

Why does Paul think it's so important for the Philippians to live "in a manner worthy of the gospel?"

What do you think Paul means that by the phrase "a sign of destruction?"

How would you describe Paul's relationship with suffering?

Discipleship Questions

How do we, in today's culture, conduct ourselves worthy of the gospel?

How and why does fear prevent us from sharing the good news of Jesus?

Paul writes to the Christians in Philippi "since you are going through the same struggle." In what ways do we today still engage in the same struggle as Paul and the early church?

Practical Philippians

Reinterpret your suffering. Take some time by yourself or with someone you love and respect to reflect on a time of suffering in your life. How did or does that suffering draw you closer to Christlikeness? In what ways was your suffering *for Christ*?

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 2:1-4

Devotional

This week as I was reading through the commentaries on this text, I was captured by the beauty and poetry of this passage as translated by the scholar Gerald Hawthorne in his commentary. He translates,

*"Therefore, if in any way I have give you encouragement in Christ, if in any way my love has consoled you, if in any way you have enjoyed the fellowship created by the Spirit, if in any way you have experienced the tenderness and compassion of God in Christ, then make my joy complete: Think alike. Love alike. Be of one soul. Be of one mind. Do not act out of a spirit of rivalry, nor out of empty conceit. Act rather with humility and consider others better than yourselves. Each of you must look to the interests of other as well as to the interests of yourselves."*²

I was struck by the simplicity and poignancy of Paul's words. We speak so much and say so little in our world today. Yet, Paul can encourage Christian virtue with simple phrases like "love alike" or "consider others better than yourselves." This is what it means to be a citizen of heaven. It isn't complex. The secret is simple and calls me to simple action.

Memory Verse:

"Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind."

2:2

Introduction

Often lost in the translation of this text is the poetry and rhetorical rhythm of Paul's encouragement. The key to this text is the usage of "if." The translation of the word *ei* into English as "if" suggests an idea of conditional agreement between Paul and the Philippians. We might misunderstand Paul to be wondering *if* the Philippians actually feel this way, but nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, Paul uses this word to show the inclusive nature of their relationship. Fowl points out "if read aloud in Greek, these 'if' clauses carry a certain rhythm and, perhaps, convey Paul's personal passion here."¹ Paul stacks four lines upon each other. Each are intended to spiritually and emotionally call the readers to remember their identity in Christ and their abiding relationship with Paul. The lines are better read:

Therefore,

*if you have any consolation in Christ,
if any comfort of love,
if any fellowship of Spirit,
if any affection and compassion,
fulfill my joy...*

Non-Believer

People watch the way we treat each other. Why would I ever want to join ranks with a group that bites and devours one another. When we look to the interests of others and act with humility by having the same love, we are alluring and attractive to a world that knows only "get yours" and "get what you deserve." Choose humility and love this week not for yourself, but for the friend who doesn't know Christ... yet.

SECRET of BEING CONTENT

Humility

Humility has become such an endeared virtue in western culture that sometimes we can overlook how radical of a concept it was in the ancient world. Roman civilization was based upon everyone knowing their status and staying within those expectations. Humility was reserved for slaves, women, and menial workers. In fact, it would have been considered socially inappropriate for those of high status to act with humility. The very word used in this passage, *tapeinophrosune* ("humility"), was often the word used to describe a certain social class of low standing with a slavish outlook.² Paul uses a related word to describe his own view of himself, "I know what it is to be in need" (4:12) and to describe Jesus's humility, "he humbled himself" (2:8). Jesus's humility in the cross reframes Paul's view of social standing just like his view of suffering in the first chapter. Thus, when he calls upon the Philippians Christians to humble themselves, he is pushing a radically different social agenda for the Christian community based in Christ.

Major Theme: Joy

Upon entering the second chapter of Philippians we should have already noticed one of the primary themes in the letter: joy. Paul uses some form of the word translated "joy" sixteen times (1:4, 18*2, 25; 2:2, 17*2, 18*2, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4*2, 10). Paul uses this word as both a noun and verb. To this point, Paul has prayed for the Philippians with joy (noun; 1:4), he rejoiced (verb) that Christ was preached (1:19), that his hardship will turn out for his deliverance (1:18-19), and he promotes the Philippians "joy in the faith" (noun; 1:25). In the current text, Paul calls on the Philippians to live in such a way that his joy (noun) might be complete.

Sharing in the Spirit

In chapter one Paul twice referenced the unity of the Spirit. Now, in this poetically beautiful section of his letter he once again makes a reference to the unity that comes from the Spirit (2:1). The Christians have "fellowship of the Spirit" (Gk. *koinonia pneumatos*). Some version also use the word spirit in 2:2, "being one in spirit," but the word for spirit (gk. *Pneumos*) does not occur in this verse. As in the usage in chapter 1, it is again unclear whether Paul is thinking of the Holy Spirit or the general sense of the word, spirit. What might be inciteful in understanding how to translate *pneuma* in these contexts is Paul's continued usage in the letter. He uses the word in two further places. In 3:3, Paul says that Christians are those "who serve God in (or by) Spirit." In this context it is once again unclear. The final usage might be more helpful as in 4:23, Paul closes the letter "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." Certainly, Paul means the nature or make up of a person in this context. To summarize: definitely Holy Spirit (1:19), questionable (1:27; 2:1; 3:3), definitely spirit of a person (4:23).

Text Notes

2:1 - "encouragement" (Gk. *paraklesis*). Literally, "consolation," "comfort," or "exhortation." This common word (used 29 times in the NT) can mean either comfort or exhortation. Does Paul mean to say "any comfort in Christ" or "any exhortation in Christ?" The root of the word means to call someone near.

2:3 - "vain conceit" (Gk *kenodoxia*). This word is a *hapex legomena*, which means it is only used one time in the NT. It is a combination of the words *kenosis* (giving over, emptying) and *doxia* (glory, honor). Thus it means to empty glory. Interestingly, Paul uses the verbal form of *kenosis*, *kenow* to describe Jesus giving up of glory just a few verses later in 2:7.

¹ Stephen Fowl, *Philippians*, Kindle Location 1,097.

² H. H. Esser, "Humility" in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 259.

³ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians (Word Biblical Commentary)*, 64.

Quotable

Unity, then, dominates the thinking of the apostle in this section, and he makes full use of his skill as a writer to convey to the Philippians its consummate importance. He uses words big in meaning, compacted into brief verbless phrases; rare words; and words never found anywhere else in the NT. He piles clause on top of clause, beginning each clause with the same word. He does all this as if searching for ways to make his readers both think and feel deeply about the essential nature of harmony and its necessity within the Christian community.

Gerald F. Hawthorne³

Discussion Guide

Philippians 2:1-4

Opening Question

What is one goal you have for your life?

Read Philippians 2:1-4.

Reading Questions

How would this passage have been considered radical in the Greco-Roman society of Philippi?

What do you think Paul means by the phrase “make my joy complete?”

Why does Paul think that Christian virtue is so important for propelling the Gospel?

Discipleship Questions

What is one virtue that Paul includes in 2:1-4 that you want to work on in your life?

What does selfish ambition and vein conceit look like in our world today? How do avoid it?

How has the Christian virtue of humility changed the world?

Practical Philippians

Take a walk and assess your ambition. What are you seeking after in life? What are you trying to accomplish? Who succeeds in your life if you succeed at your goals? How do these goals and accomplishments reflect the Gospel?

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 2:5-11

Introduction

Scholars are in agreement that 2:6-11 is an early Christian hymn that Paul adopts into his letter and that the Philippians would have recognized. They might have even began singing along with it. It is clear from the NT that the early Christ followers routinely sung hymns (Matt 26:30; 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). In fact, Paul and Silas were singing hymns while in prison in Philippi where all the other prisoners and guards (Acts 16:25) could hear them. What hymns did these early Christians sing? It seems obvious that as faithful Jews most of the hymns they sung were from the Psalms. Yet, it also seems likely that the early Christians quickly developed new hymns or modified known hymns for the glorification and exaltation of Jesus as the Son of God and Christ. There are four main reasons scholarship has regarded Phil. 2:6-11 as an early Christian hymn. First, this passage has a distinct tone and rhythm. Though this might just be exalted prose, it seems plausible that this is a hymn based in the rhythm and "sound" of this passage. Second, as in other recognized hymns in the NT (Col 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16) this hymn starts by being marked off with "who" (Gk. *os*). Third, this text carries a style of poetry called parallelism that was widely used in the Psalms and other Semitic poetry/hymns. Parallelism is a poetic style by which the second line repeats with different wording but similar structure as the first line. Finally if these verses were set apart from the full letter they would still make a coherent and independent thought. They seem capable of standing alone without the rest of the letter to the Philippians. If this is a hymn that Paul adopts for this usage, who then is the author? Could Paul still be the author? Where did this hymn develop? Though these questions can't be answered they do remind us of the ongoing growth of Christianity outside of the scope of Biblical history. Maybe this was in fact the hymn Paul and Silas were singing in that Philippians prison the night they met the jailer?

Devotional

It is easy when reading this magnificent poem or hymn about Christ to forget how Paul introduces it: "your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who..." In the text note on the reverse side we explore the word translated "attitude" or "mindset." The idea is that our way of thinking or our way of being. Paul uses it routinely in his letter to the Philippians to call for their unity of thinking. Have you ever met someone who thinks the way you do about things? Maybe you struck up a great friendship or shared a laugh. There was a like mindedness. A singularity of not only what was thought about, but how you thought about it. When I'm on the same page with someone else I often use the phrase, "great minds think alike..." and then I end it with "and so do ours." Paul describes Christian maturity as thinking like Christ. The greatest mind that ever walked the face of the planet was Jesus. He is the greatest teacher. The wisest sage. The most brilliant mind. We are called to share his way of thinking. Paul's words to the Philippians echo to us still today, "your mind should be the same as that of Christ Jesus..." Great minds think alike. Do you try and follow Jesus example, or are you trying to think like him? Have you allowed you're his mind to mesh with yours?

Memory Verse:

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow."

2:9-10

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Kenosis - Emptied Himself

Within this famous “Christ-hymn” Christ is said to have “made himself nothing” (NIV; 2:7) or “emptied himself” (ESV, NASB, et al.). The word translated “emptied” is *kenow*. It literally means to “to empty” or “make void.” Since the second century AD the church has struggled to understand what it means that Jesus “emptied himself.” At the height of the controversy there were a multitude of conflicting and arguing theories that shouldn’t be discussed here. At the core of the problem was the issue of whether Christ remained as God while he was human. Some argued that Christ emptied himself of all deity when he became flesh while others argued that he retained all deity but took on a shell of humanity. In between these two extremes there were as many as seven different substantial views. This might seem an unimportant point of squabble for aloof academics, but it is actually an essential core value of the Christian faith. When Christ’s deity is not understood properly he becomes nothing more than a good philosopher or moral example. Yet, Christ is more than a good example, his atoning sacrifice and glorious resurrection is a divine activity. In fact, what the text does not tell is what Jesus emptied himself *of*. The word, *kenow*, as used in other NT contexts (Rom 4:14; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:15; 2 Cor 9:3) means “to be something void” or “without effect.” Christ did not empty himself of deity. Rather, in divine humility he emptied himself of what was owed to him that he might bring honor to his Father.

In Nature

As important as understanding what is meant by *kenow* is how to translate the phrase *os en morphe* “being in very nature” (1:6). Some translations choose to translate this as “although he existed in the form of God” (NASB), yet, it should better be understood as “who, being in the very nature God.” In his incarnation and death Jesus did not go against his divine nature. Rather, it was precisely because of his divine nature that he humbled himself. We might read *form* to mean a type, but in Greek though it referred to being consistent with reality. So to speak, “it was true to form.” The idea here is clear that Christ was in full reality God and that he took on, in full reality, the likeness, appearance, and nature of humankind. As Eugene Peterson translates, “He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to his advantages of that status.”¹

“This passage stands at the heart of Paul’s understanding of God himself. Christ serves as pattern, to be sure; but he does so as the one who most truly expresses God’s nature. As God, Christ poured himself out, not seeking his own advantage. As man, in his incarnation, he humbled himself unto death on the cross. That this is what God is like is the underlying Pauline point; and since God is in process of recreating us in his image, this becomes the heart of the present appeal. The Philippians - and ourselves - are not called upon simply to ‘imitate God’ by what we do, but to have this very mind, the mind of Christ, developed in us, so that we too bear God’s image in our attitudes and relationships within the Christian community - and beyond.”

Gordon Fee³

Text Notes

2:6 - “mindset” (Gk. *phroneo*). Literally, “to have mind,” “to think,” “to have understanding.” One of Paul’s primary motifs for Christian maturity is that people should be “thinking like Jesus.” It is not simply that we imitate the teacher, but that we allow his mind to be our mind. That we become like minded with him. Paul uses this idea consistently throughout Philippians (1:7; 2:2, 5; 3:15, 16, 19; 4:2, 10*2).

2:10-11 - “knee should bow... every tongue confess (Gk. *pan gonu... pasa glossa*). This phrase, broken up by “in heaven and on earth and under the earth,” is a deeply rooted prophetic idea taken from Isaiah 45:23. In Isaiah 45 God asserts that all should turn to him for ‘deliverance in the LORD’ (45:25) for the day of total allegiance to God will come to every person whether they desire it or not.

2:10 - “under the earth” (Gk. *Katachthonios*). Though this word is a *hapax legomena* (only used once in the NT), it refers to the Greek idea of those who have departed. They are buried “under the ground.” The idea here is that all people will eventually bend the knee to Jesus regardless of living or deceased.

¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, Phil. 2:6.

³ Gordon D. Fee, “Philippians 2:5-11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992): 45.

Discussion Guide

Philippians 2:5-11

Opening Question

Who is someone that you find yourself thinking like?

Read Philippians 2:5-11.

Reading Questions

What quality of Jesus sticks out to you in this passage and why?

If you came to know Jesus only from this passage, what would you know about him?

Why do scholars think this is an early Christian hymn? Do you think it is? Why or why not?

Discipleship Questions

In what ways do you struggle to humble yourself before God and others?

Paul thinks of Christian maturity as having the same mind that Christ had. How is that different than what you think or have been taught about Christian maturity?

What does it mean practically in your life and church life to have the same mind as Christ?

Practical Philippians

Sing a different hymn about Christ every day this week. Start your morning with it and see if you can get it stuck in your head for the rest of each day of the week. How does singing about Christ cultivate Christian maturity?

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 2:12-18

Introduction

Now using the beautiful Christ hymn of 2:6-11 as the backdrop, Paul continues to reframe the Philippians current circumstances through the Gospel of Jesus. He urges the Philippians to obedience. Whereas in some of his letters Paul urges the audience to move from disobedience to obedience, in this letter Paul urges the audience to continue their obedience "as you have always obeyed" (2:12). What does obedience look like to Paul and for the Christian community? First, Paul calls back to the Christ-hymn in 2:8 where Jesus himself is said to have "become obedient to death... even death on a cross." Paul calls the Christians to obedience in the same way that Christ has been obedient. To be a follower of Christ is to follow in the same obedience he showed to the Father. Second, obedience looks like them continuing to "work out their salvation." For Paul, obedience, like faithfulness, involves continuing in the Gospel despite what stands before them. Third, their obedience is not obedience to Paul but obedience to God, "who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (2:13). Fourth, obedience does not allow for "grumbling or complaining" (2:14). Finally, those who are obedient radiate light to a dark world when they hold on to the word of life (2:15-16).

For the Non-believer

Lately my daughter has been singing one of the greatest songs of all time: "This Little Light of Mine." I was thinking about that reading through the text this week. At what point do we think as Christians we outgrow that song? In a crooked and depraved world we are told we shine. Our goal is not to shine actually. Paul doesn't actually tell the Philippians to shine. Instead, he tells them to hold firmly to the word of life. What is the word of life? It's Jesus! It's the very same Jesus described in 2:6-11. When we hold on to Jesus, that's when we shine like lights in a dark world.

Devotional

The people that I spend the most time on the phone with are my family. I end all of these phone calls intentionally with the phrase, "love you!" If it's the last time I talk with that person I want them to know that I love them. Despite my best efforts this closing sometimes is more of a habit than an intentional statement of intimacy. A few years ago I was on the phone with one of the members of our church. He is like a grandpa to me. Grumpy from time to time but also always encouraging. He is a tough ole' bird and has spent most of his life hunting the mountains of Montana on horseback. A man's man. We had been chatting a while on the call when it was time to end it, I accidentally and habitually said, "Alright I gotta go. Love you! Talk to you later." Immediately, I caught myself. There was the most awkward pause ever. "I can't believe I just said that," I thought to myself. Then I heard in reply, "well Brandon, I love you too." Paul's favorite description of Christians in the churches he has planted is "beloved" or, to modernize the language, "loved ones." As Christ followers, we should be unashamed to express our Christian love for our brothers and sisters in the church. "Love you," at the right time, says "I'm faithful committed to you," and "I care about you."

Memory Verse:

"It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."

2:13

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Work Out Your Salvation?

Paul calls upon the Philippian Christians to “work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling” (2:12). This verse is commonly misunderstood and misquoted to mean that a Christians eternal salvation is still being worked out through Christian obedience. For the contemporary Christian with primarily a concern for individual salvation, this might seem obvious from the text. Indeed, Paul is writing about obedience, work, and salvation all in the same text. Likewise, these things are done with “fear and trembling,” which gives the connotation that you should be scared you won’t make it. Some have abused this text to question their own salvation and the salvation of others. Simply put, the Philippian Christians would *never* have heard this text in this way. First, in this passage “dear friends,” “obey,” “own,” and “salvation” are all written in the plural form referring to the church as a whole. The entire context for this verse is how the entire community is to act and interact with one another. This might be hard for us to understand, but Paul is speaking about the church as a whole working out their salvation by remaining faithful in the midst of their suffering. Second, Paul spoke about his own salvation or deliverance in 1:19. In that text he framed his suffering through the lens of his salvation or deliverance. Suffering through trials is an innate part of life in Christ. This is the same word (Gk. *soteria*) that Paul now uses for the whole community. Fear and trembling are a natural part of enduring through suffering. Finally, Paul routinely calls upon Christians to ethically live out of their eternal salvation. This does not deny God’s exclusive act in salvation. Rather, because of God’s salvific activity, the saved community of believers lives a different, eternally bound lifestyle. The CEV provides this idea well in their translation, “So work with fear and trembling to discover what it really means to be saved” (2:12).

Theme: Rejoice

Paul concludes his extended thought that runs from 2:1-18 with the admonition that the Philippian Christians should rejoice. As has been pointed out, joy and rejoicing are one of the prominent themes in the letter. In this passage, Paul uses rhetorical flair by flipping the lines. Not only is he glad and rejoicing with all of them, but they also should be glad and rejoice with him. Paul has reframed both his and his audiences current conditions through the Gospel of Jesus and the end result is communal joy with one another in Christ.

Quotable

“Fear and trembling” is in the emphatic position in the Greek, and so Paul is placing strong emphasis on this attitude. This phrase occurs in texts like Exod. 15:16; Isa. 19:16; 1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; and Eph. 6:5, and here it most likely refers to the Philippians’ reaction to God’s presence, not to emotions caused by intra-human relationships or behavior. These words suggest that God is present with them and observing their behavior, and so they should act as if God is in their midst and behave! Of course Paul wants to be proud of his converts on judgment day, the Day of Christ (see 1:6,10; 2:16), when Christians will be held accountable for their behavior (see 2 Cor. 5:10).

Ben Witherington¹

Text Notes

2:15 - “in a warped and crooked generation.” This is an intentional quote from Deut 32:5. Whereas in Deut 32:5 the author is describing the Israelites as no longer being Gods children, Paul is saying that in the midst of that deprived and corrupted generation Christians now shine like lights.

2:15 - “stars” (Gk. *phoster*). Literally, “a light.” This word is used in a variety of ways to refer to simply a light, a lamp, or anything that revealed light. It can also refer to stars. Likewise, it is used in Rev 21:11 to describe the radiance of the new Jerusalem. The LXX uses the word to in the creation narrative of Genesis 1 to describe the lights separated in the sky. Some argue that Paul is taking this imagery from Daniel 12:3 where the prophet describes the righteous as shining on into the ages.

2:17 - “poured out like a drink offering” (Gk. *spendo*). This interesting little verb is only used twice in the NT. Paul also says to Timothy, “I am now ready to be offered” (2 Tim 4:6). This word is used commonly in the LXX to describe an offering to YHWH or, at times, to other ‘gods.’ The word means to pour out a cup or make a libation. In this context Paul is saying that he is being poured out like an offering to God.

¹ Ben Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Kindle Location 3761.

Discussion Guide

Philippians 2:12-18

Opening Question

Who is someone you haven't seen for a while and are missing right now? Why that person?

Read Philippians 2:12-18.

Reading Questions

What is the relationship you see in this text between obedience, work, and salvation? How does understand the context of the letter help us understand 2:12?

Why does Paul use the phrase "fear and trembling?"

In this passage, what does Paul want to boast about before God?

Discipleship Questions

What makes us shine as Christians?

In what ways in your life do you find God calling you to be poured out like a drink offering as a sacrifice?

Why is it so hard to do everything without grumbling or complaining?

Practical Philippians

Try and go a whole day without grumbling or complaining. Start your morning with prayer asking God to take a discontent spirit from you and invade you with his Spirit. Every time you start to complain or grumble, stop yourself with grace and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for someone in your life.

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 2:19-30

Devotional

After reflecting deeply and devotedly on the character and nature of Christ for living in community and reframe the happenings of everyday life and struggles as a Christian, Paul lets the audience into his heart. In these passages he speaks out of commitment and care for his son in the faith, Timothy, and a man he has the utmost regards and honor for, Epaphroditus. See Philippians isn't really a theology of joy. It isn't Christian philosophy on suffering or imprisonment. It isn't really a theological treatise at all actually. It's a letter. We must be reminded from time to time. It's a letter, a letter to *people*. That's what it's about for Paul. In Paul's heart is people. It is a heart centered in the person of Jesus Christ. In fact for Paul the Gospel itself is the proclamation of the person Jesus' story: his life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Where Jesus is centered so others are found. That's why when you look in Paul's heart there you also find Timothy, Epaphroditus, and the Philippian Christians among so many others. These passages remind us that at the heart of Christianity has always been God's love for *people*. Is your heart full of people? Who are the people on your heart that need to be reminded that they are on your heart this week?

Memory Verse:

So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him.

2:29

SECRET of BEING CONTENT

Timothy

Background: According to Acts 16 Timothy was from Lysstra, located in Asia Minor. He was born of a Jewish mother who became a Christ follower. His dad was Greek, which means that he came from a mixed background and was not circumcised. He was strongly raised in the Jewish faith by his pious mother, Eunice and grandmother, Lois (2 Tim 1:5). On their second journey through Lysstra, Paul and Silas picked up Timothy as a traveling companion. It was not unusual at the time for men to take on younger traveling companions to help tend to their needs and run errands. So that Timothy will be accepted in the Jewish synagogues on their travels, Paul circumcised him (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy grew close to Paul through the following years and served in an apostolic and leadership position throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, and Crete. Within the NT there are over 24 references to him and 2 specific letters written from Paul to him (1 & 2 Timothy).

Relationship with Philippians: It is most likely that Timothy is present with Paul when the church in Philippi is established though he is not mentioned by name. Paul wishes to send Timothy to the Philippians following Epaphroditus to hear back from the church about how they are doing. Most likely he will also give them pastoral guidance and teaching. It might even be possible that he will bring another letter from Paul with him.

Timothy's Character: Paul says that there is no one else quite like Timothy because he is exclusively devoted to Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul thinks of Timothy like his own son. Timothy serves Paul "in the gospel," which means he either serves alongside Paul in the Gospel or he is serving Paul on behalf of the Gospel.

Epaphroditus

Background: Little is known about Epaphroditus's upbringing or heritage. It seems most likely that he is from Philippi. The name Epaphroditus was a common name in the first century AD. It is Greek deriving from the name of the deity Aphrodite, who was the Goddess of love. Epaphroditus is most likely from a Greek family and is possibly a Roman citizen.

Relationship with Philippians: Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippians to deliver a financial gift to Paul. He served as a delegate on behalf of the church and was instructed to also gather an update on Paul's condition. Along this journey he fell severely ill and nearly died. Still, he managed to deliver the gift. Having now recovered from his illness, Paul is sending him back with this letter to the relief of the church in Philippi. Unnoticed by the modern reader in this text is the issue of honor, which is at stake for the Philippians Christians. In a Greco-Roman culture, a persons honor was of highest value to their family, friends, and associates. Paul's imprisonment would have been seen as shameful. In Roman prisons, the family of the imprisoned were responsible for taking care of them by providing food and clothing. It would be even more shameful for both Paul and the Philippian Christians if his needs weren't met. Likewise, "Epaphroditus felt honor-bound to get to Paul, even at great personal risk, and Paul wants the audience to know, even though Epaphroditus was sent back quickly to them, that he accomplished his mission and should be honored for valorous service."¹

Epaphroditus Character: Paul calls him a brother, co-worker, fellow-soldier, apostle and minister. Because Epaphroditus's honor might be in question, Paul praises him for his dedication and specifically tells the church to show him honor.

Text Notes

2:20 - "like him" (Gk. *isopsuchos*). Literally, "of equal soul." This *hapex legomena* (used once in NT) carries the idea of being one in being or like-minded. This little word is very insightful into Paul and Timothy's relationship. Timothy thinks, acts, feels, cares, etc. about the churches in the same way that Paul does. He's not doing it for personal gain but for the gain of the Gospel.

2:15 - "messenger" (Gk. *apostolos*). Literally, "messenger." The term that is translated messenger here can be transliterated as "apostle." It isn't a statement of status but of role.

¹ Ben Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Kindle Location 3761.

Discussion Guide

Philippians 2:19-30

Opening Question

Do you have anyone in your life who's like a parent or sibling to you even though they aren't blood relation? Why is this person so special?

Read Philippians 2:19-30.

Reading Questions

Describe Paul's relationship with Timothy.

Describe Epaphroditus's relationship with the church in Philippi.

How is honor and shame at play in this text?

Discipleship Questions

Why is it important to have deep, family like relationships with other Christians?

Be honest, if you were called to risk your life on behalf of the Gospel, would you do it? Why or why not?

To whom has God sent you?

Practical Philippians

Visit someone who is homebound or sick this week. This is a simple practice that was at the heart of the Christianity from its foundation but is slowly being lost in the church. Take time to not only visit with them but to pray with them.

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 3:1-9

Introduction

Paul moves out of the travelogue and into the next theological and practical portion of the letter with the phrase “further” or “finally.” Despite this, Paul continues for another two chapters. Some scholars suggest that because of this “finally” there are actually two letters combined here into one lengthy letter. Yet, anyone who has sat through a church service understands that just because the preacher says “finally” doesn’t mean you’re quite to the end. Instead, Paul seems to just be getting going rhetorically. The very thought of his opponents in Philippi promoting a Gospel based on circumcision or other flesh activities works Paul into a frenzy specifically because that is the religious life that Jesus rescued him from. Chapters 3-4 build off of Paul’s enthusiasm for this subject.

Faith in/of Jesus

One wonderful advance that has taken place in recent biblical scholarship is the discussion of the phrase *pisteos Christou*. This phrase has traditionally been translated “faith in Christ” as many translations offer for 3:9. Yet, recent translators have rightly argued that this phrase is better translated “faithfulness of Christ.” The difference between the two approaches is important. If the phrase is “faith in Christ” then it allows for the idea that a person’s righteousness comes through their own faith abilities. Yet, if the phrase is translated “faithfulness of Christ” then it places righteousness in the activity and perfect submission/trust of Jesus. This seems to fit better with Paul’s thoughts in this passage. Paul makes it clear he wants no righteousness of his own, but he wants to “gain Christ,” “know Christ,” and “be found in him.” Thus, Paul wouldn’t suggest his faith has earned him anything, but he’s found everything in Christ’s faithfulness. Righteousness then “comes from God on the basis of faithfulness.”

Devotional

What gives you identity? It’s so easy as a Christian to respond “Jesus gives me my identity.” It is more difficult to live this out in practice. So often we allow our identity to be constructed by our success (or failure) or by our social status. We might build an identity around our favorite hobby or family. Yet, we know that we are to find identity in Christ. For as long as people have sought to follow Christ, they have also sought to find identity in Christ and what this means in their every day life. Paul’s rant here about his identity demonstrates this well. Paul lays out all the things that used to give him identity: his heritage, his lineage, his self-righteousness, his knowledge, and his zeal. Notice that all of these elements are ways that he is distinguished from others around him. He wasn’t just a faithful Israelites, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He wasn’t just righteous, he was blameless. He wasn’t just zealous, he was zealous to the point of persecution. If we are honest, so often our identity is also based on what distinguishes us from others. In light of knowing Christ Jesus, Paul considers all of these distinguishing markers of identity garbage. In practice what it means to find identity in Christ begins with releasing the need to be defined by what distinguishes us.

Memory Verse:

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.

3:7-8

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Circumcision and Flesh

The important role of circumcision and language of the flesh can often be overlooked in reading this text in modern translations. Paul quickly establishes the contrast between his teaching and the teaching of those “dogs, those evil doers, those mutilators of the flesh.” He uses a stark word play between the words *katatomēn* (“mutilators of the flesh) and *peritomen* (“Circumcision”). Both words are derived from the root word *tomen*, which means to cut. These words are separated in 3:2-3 by only four words. The second word, *peritomen*, is extremely common and refers specifically to Jewish circumcision. To contrast this common word, Paul uses the incredibly rare word *katatomēn* that exists nowhere else in the NT. In the LXX the related verb *Katatemno* is used to describe the “pagan rite of slitting the skin, a practice forbidden to Israel.”¹ Paul is contending that those who oppose his ministry and preach a different gospel are in fact the unfaithful pagans. Those who follow Paul’s teaching belong instead to community of believers. This argument continues when Paul says that the faithful Christians have “put no confidence in the flesh.” In fact, Paul himself used to put confidence in the flesh (3:4), but he doesn’t any longer. If his opponents really want to play these flesh games, Paul ensures his readers his boasting in the flesh would be even greater! Instead of flesh markers, Paul now finds his identity exclusively in the flesh activity of Jesus Christ.

Dogs

Paul begins his warning to the Philippians in v. 2 by tell his audience to “watch out for those dogs!” He doesn’t choose this imagery lightly. Whereas the modern reader might have the portrait of a dog as a loveable, household pet, in the Greco-Roman world dogs were like the raccoons and opossums of today. They hid in the shadows of the streets sneakily devouring and destroying elements of city life. This was a commonly used word by Hebrews to refer to Gentiles. If Paul’s opponents that he’s referring to here are Judaizers than this insult is especially stark. Though he only uses the precise word “dog” once in this letter, just a few short lines later Paul refers to his status of the flesh as *skubalon* (“dung”). This vulgar word was commonly used to refer to the excrement of dogs and the scraps that were thrown to them. Thus, he considers all the distinguishing markers of the flesh as excrement of or for the dogs.

Gains and Losses

In 3:7, Paul makes a quick play on words by contrasting the words *moikerde* “gains” and *zemia* “losses.” These words are commonly used for accounting or social status. Thus, what Paul used to use on his social ledger as a gain (lineage, legalistic righteousness) he now considers as a loss on the social ledger. It is clear that Paul refuses to play the same games of social status that his opponents and others in Greco-Roman society continue to play.

Text Notes

3:3 - “serve God by his Spirit.” (Gk. *Pneumati theou latreuontes*). This phrase can be translated either as “worship (or serve) God by the Spirit” or, more likely, “worship by the Spirit of God.” Paul seems to be promoting the idea that his service or worship (same Greek word) comes from God’s Spirit.

3:3, 4 - “flesh” (Gk. *sarks*). Literally, “flesh.” Paul uses this word differently in different contexts, but most often *sarks* “flesh” is used to contrast *pneuma* “Spirit.” In these cases the flesh is the lusts of the world i.e. evil while the Spirit is that which derives from God i.e. holy. Though that’s possible in this passage as *Pneuma* appears in 3:3, it is more likely here Paul is using flesh in association with the flesh of circumcision and its physical appearance.

3:8 - “garbage” (Gk. *skubalon*). Literally, “dung.” This word was a sparingly used vulgar word that referred to the excrement of any animal but most often specifically dogs. It also referred to garbage or anything without value.

¹ Philippians, Kindle Location 5798.

² J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*.

Quotable

“There is a difference between knowing God and knowing about God. When you truly know God, you have energy to serve Him, boldness to share Him, and contentment in Him.”

J. I. Packer²

Discussion Guide

Philippians 3:1-9

Opening Question

What's something that really makes you mad? Be kind as you share.

Read Philippians 3:1-9.

Reading Questions

What stands out to you about the words Paul uses to describe those the Christians should avoid in 3:2?

Where does Paul understand righteousness to come from and how it attained?

Paul uses three phrases to describe his relationship with Christ. What are they and what do they mean?

Discipleship Questions

How has Jesus changed your identity and understanding of self?

In your life what has it meant to be found in Christ?

Practical Philippians

Take out the trash. Paul says that everything in his life that used to give him status is now garbage compared to knowing Christ. What in your life do you need to throw away so you may be completely found in Christ? Take a token from each of these elements in your life. Maybe it's a make-up bag for vanity or a credit card for spending and throw them in the trash. On each one pray that God will help you find your identity wholly in Christ.

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 3:10-21

Introduction

It is fairly difficult to break chapter three down into distinct sections as Paul is making one extensive argument through the entire chapter. As discussed in previous notes, he begins by distinguishing the Christians in Philippi from their opponents and encourages them to rejoice (3:1-3). He then personalizes this argument by demonstrating how he has more reason to boast based on lineage and legalistic righteousness than anyone (3:4-6). Despite this, Paul only wants to be found in Christ having Christ's righteousness (3:8-9). In this week's text Paul continues to express his personal desire to know Christ by adopting athletic imagery. He is "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead" (3:13). Likewise, he says, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize (3:14). Then Paul switches back to the Christians in Philippi by encouraging them to "join together in following my example" so that Jesus "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (3:21). The rhetorical flow of the argument in Chapter 3 looks like this:

Church>Opponents>Paul>Jesus>Paul>Opponents-Church

For the Non-Believer

Paul makes an interesting statement in 3:12, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." Paul is saying that not only has he yearned to take hold of Christ, but, actually, Christ has also yearned to take hold of Paul. Sometimes in discussion with non-believers we focus all our energy in trying to convince them to take hold of Jesus. Yet, it is important at times to be reminded that Jesus himself is yearning to take hold of them as well! We too often put too much pressure on ourselves or think that it is our sole responsibility to convince someone to be a Christian. We must be reminded that Christ is more effective and his Holy Spirit more powerful than any word or argument we might make. This reminder gives us boldness to share the Gospel freely.

Devotional

Last week we talked about practical ways to find identity in Christ. Paul not only wants to find identity in Christ but he also wants to grow in his identity in Christ. How do we as Christians likewise practically grow as Christians. In his reflections on this passage Tony Compolo lays out "five challenges for growing in maturity" that I find as practically useful. First, "humbly acknowledge that you haven't arrived." In 3:12-13, the apostle Paul himself acknowledges how he isn't perfect yet. He still longs for deeper relationship with Christ. Second, "passionately pursue a greater knowledge of Christ." Whereas many people acknowledge that they aren't perfect, Paul doesn't stop there. Instead, in 3:12-14 he pursues a deeper knowledge of Christ. Third, we, like Paul, should "never lose the wonder of the Gospel." Despite his many years of preaching the Gospel, throughout Philippians Paul is still astonished by the magnificence of the gospel. Fourth, Christians grow by following "cross-centered, heavenly minded example." in 3:15-19 Paul demonstrates that imitation of other Christians is at the core of Christian maturity. Finally, to grow in Christ is to "live in light of your true citizenship." In 3:20-21 Paul beautifully reminds the Christian that we are a part of and still longing for our heavenly citizenship.¹

Memory Verse:

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.

3:20-21

SECRET of BEING CONTENT

Know Christ

Phil. 3:9-10 is truly one of the great concise statements of sanctification, Christian living, and discipleship in all of Paul's writings. In 3:1-9, Paul argues that everything that gave him identity he now finds as rubbish in comparison to being found in Christ. Paul accentuates this point by saying he wants to "know Christ." Paul was converted by Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9). He makes it clear in both 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and Galatians 1:11-16 that it was Christ himself who directly taught Paul the Gospel. Despite his personal relationship with Jesus, Paul still says he wants to "know Christ." Paul's longing for deeper relationship and identity with Christ is at the core of his teacher. A Christian is not simply saved and sent on their merry way. They earnestly long for a sustaining, eternal identity formed through knowing Christ. Paul expounds on this point with three phrases. In fact, in the original Greek the verb "know" points forward to three phrase. Paul wants to know Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings. To know Christ then is to know resurrection and suffering. This is not exclusively head knowledge. It is a holistic commitment to being found in Christ. According to Paul it results in two things. First, the Christian becomes like Christ in his death. The word translated "becoming like" is *summorpho*. The adjectival form of this word occurs later in 3:21 and it literally means to become one in likeness with something or someone else. In the later case it is transformation in Christ glorious body, but in this case the Christian is conformed to Christ's death (the note below explores this concept further). Second, the Christian anticipates and strives to "attain to the resurrection from the dead." Life in Christ is the life of death and resurrection allegiant to the heavenly citizenship and anticipating the transformation into Christ's glorious body!

Conformed to Death

What does Paul mean that he wants to take on the form of Christ's death? Stephen E. Fowl in his Commentary on Philippians wonderfully answers this question. "Paul attains knowledge of Christ, including both the power of his resurrection and fellowship of his sufferings, by becoming "conformed to his death." How might one be conformed to Christ's death? If it simply meant crucifixion at the hands of the Romans, then Paul did not conform to Christ's death and we cannot. But we should continue to let the story of Christ in 2:6-11 determine what conformity to Christ's death should mean. Three interrelated characteristics of Christ's death emerge from that story. First, it is the result of seeking the benefit of others. Christ did not use his equality with God as something for his own advantage. Second, it is the result of willed self-emptying. Third, it is the result of obedience to God. If we allow these characteristics to shape an understanding of conformity to Christ's death, then we can see the ways in which Paul's manner of life and our own might be ways of sharing in Christ's sufferings and, thus, being conformed to Christ's death."¹

Text Notes

3:17 - "together in following" (Gk. *summimetes*). Literally, "an imitator of others," or "co-imitator." Once again Paul uses a word with the *sum* prefix, which means with or together. In this case though it is not "with" Christ, but "with" Paul. The Philippian Christians are called to be co-imitators with Paul in following others in Christlikeness.

3:21 - "body" (Gk. *Soma*). Paul twice uses the word *soma* in this verse to contrast the present lowly body with the glorious body that is to come. Previously in 1:20, he longed for God to be glorified in his body (Gk. *soma*) through life or death. He returns to this theme here by assuring the Philippian Christians that this lowly body will someday be glorious!

Quotable

"In all of Paul's letters, perhaps the most important single statement having to do with the doctrine of sanctification is found in Philippians 3:8-16. Holiness described here is an ever-increasing apprehension of the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ by the Christian, with nothing whatsoever allowed to destroy or diminish this apprehension. In turn it is also an apprehension of the Christian by Jesus Christ. Both elements are present - the work of God or Christ, and the work of the Christian."

G. F. Hawthorne²

¹ Philippians: A Two Horizons Commentary, Kindle Edition, 2166. .

² G. F. Hawthorne, "Philippians" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 713.

³ Tony Compolo, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, 207-208.

Discussion Guide

Philippians 3:10-21

Opening Question

Have you ever competed in an endurance event like a marathon, triathlon or all you can eat buffet? What did that teach you?

Read Philippians 3:10-21

Reading Questions

In this passage, what does it mean to know Christ?

Why do you think Paul adopts athletic imagery here to describe the Christian life?

What does this passage teach us about heaven and our citizenship in heaven?

Discipleship Questions

Paul describes the opponents in Philippi with these words, “their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is their shame. What does he mean by these three phrases? Would these words still describe people in our world today? Why or why not?

Who do you have in your life that serves as a model of Christ? Describe your relationship with that person.

Practical Philippians

Set a goal for The Goal. Set a goal in your life that is difficult to accomplish but possible over the next few weeks or months. Maybe it's to run a half-marathon, walk a 5k or rake every leaf in your yard. Throughout your time training or striving toward that goal think and pray about your Christian life. How does the training relate and differ? How does the goal relate and differ? Why is a goal always better accomplished with others?

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 4:1-7

Devotional

I love to cook. It's one of my favorite things to do. I have an assortment of pots and pans but my favorite to use is my non-stick sauté pan. It has great balance and flips an omelet with ease. It drives me crazy when I see someone cooking with my pan and using a fork, spoon, knife or anything metal to cook with! I get pretty worked up over it and people think I'm crazy. Yet, I know that it only takes one little scratch in the nonstick coating on that pan to bring the demise of my favorite pan. I've seen it happen so many times. Around the cut it starts to corrode and stick more and more. That's why I'm so protective of my pan. I think anxiety can be the same way. It seems like no big deal. It's just something we have to deal with but soon it becomes a severe weakness in our hearts. That which used to not stick now sticks deeply and creates corrosion at the core of who we are. Paul calls upon the church to not be anxious about anything. In other words, a little anxiety is never alright. Instead, we are to present our requests to God through prayer and petition in every situation. When this happens Paul says God's transcendent peace will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The way we deal with the corrosiveness of anxiety is through prayer. God's response is to offer us his peace which then guards our hearts.

Introduction

Paul traditionally uses "therefore" (Gk. Oste) to wrap up an extended argument and transition either into practical implications of his previous argument or a different section of the letter. In this case it is a bit of both. The lofty language of chapter three transitions now into the more tangible language of church life. He encourages the "brothers and sisters" to "stand firm." Even more practically Euodia and Syntyche are encouraged to get along by name and he also names his fellow worker Clement. In the same way he encourages evident gentleness, abundant joy, relentless prayer and transcendent peace. It is evident from this section that Paul deeply misses the Philippian Christians and wishes he was sharing a meal with them now. In the midst of his imprisonment, Paul says they are "whom I love and long for, my joy and crown." Paul's heart is with them.

The Lord is Near

In the midst of encouragement to rejoice, be gentle, and be prayerful, Paul seemingly out of now where says "*O Kurios eggus*" (The Lord is near). In his commentary, Hellerman lays out three possibilities for the meaning of near. First, it may refer to a spatial proximity such as being "close to" or "nearby." Jesus is not far away from us. He is ever present. Second, it might refer to temporal proximity as in Jesus will return soon. Third, and most likely, it refers to both as a kind of double entendre. This would be supported within the LXX which refers to the Day of the Lord being near (Zeph 1:7; 14) and the Lord being near in worship (Ps 115:18). In either case Paul sees the nearness of Jesus as a helpful reminder in being gentle with one another and trusting through anxiety.

Memory Verse:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

4:4

SECRET of BEING CONTENT

Euodia and Syntechē

Paul pleads with Euodia and Syntechē to get along. It is the only place in all of Paul's letters where people in division are specifically addressed and named. Some scholars have argued that the division between these two women is the primary purpose why Paul writes the letter to begin with, but this seems unlikely in light of all the various issues Paul has addressed throughout the letter. It is more likely Paul received word from Epaphroditus of this disagreement and Paul is quickly addressing it. Note also that Paul refers to both of these women as having "contended at my side for the cause of the Gospel." Evidently, Euodia and Syntechē are well respected women in the church. Paul is not astonished or, seemingly, even angered at their disagreement nor does he take a side in the argument. He simply calls for reconciliation and unity for the cause of the gospel.

Theme: Joy

With gusto, Paul returns to one of his primary themes throughout the letter: joy! Using the verbal form (Gk. *xairete*) Paul urges the Philippian Christians not once but twice to rejoice! It's important to remember that though we have spent weeks reading through Philippians, the audience would have heard the letter in one sitting. They are curious how Paul is doing in his imprisonment. You can imagine the relief and, even, joy that overcomes the church as Epaphroditus reads the letter and they hear Paul say over and over again, rejoice! This is so important to Paul that he repeats the command, "Rejoice! I will say it again: rejoice!"

Theme: Likeminded

Paul calls on Euodia and Syntechē to come to the "same mind." This phrase, "same mind" has been used throughout Philippians to describe the unity Christians should have with one another (1:7; 2:2; 3:15-16) and with Christ (2:5). It is an often overlooked theme throughout Philippians. In fact, the word translated same mind (Gk. *phronein*) is used more in Philippians than any other book of the NT (1:7; 2:2 (2), 5; 3:15 (2), 16, 19; 4:2, 10 (2). Many of these uses are translated differently based on context, but Paul seems adamant on this point: Christians should be likeminded with Jesus and, thus, with fellow Christians. Those who are enemies of Christ are likeminded in earthly things, but Christians are likeminded as citizens of heaven. That's why it is so important that Euodia and Syntechē be like-minded in their efforts for the Gospel.

Text Notes

4:2 - "book of life" (Gk. *biblio zoes*). This phrase is unusual for Paul (his only usage is here) but is a very common biblical metaphor to describe those who belong to the eternal kingdom of God. Though the foundation of this imagery is established in Exodus 32:32-33 it is developed further in Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1 and seems to be alluded to by Jesus in Luke 10:20. It is a routine reference in Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 20:15; 22:19).

4:5 - "co-workers" (Gk. *sunergos*). Literally, "fellow-workers." Paul uses this word routinely to describe those who work alongside him for the sake of the Gospel (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 1:24; Col 4:11, et al.).

Quotable

One of the most striking things about the command to be free from anxiety is that, by connecting it to the command to pray, Paul makes it clear that freedom from anxiety is not a matter of self-mastery. Stoics, although they used a different vocabulary, also sought freedom from anxiety. This, however, could really be achieved only through a self-mastery which rendered one indifferent to the ups and downs of fortune. In contrast to this, Paul ties the Philippians' prospects for freedom from anxiety to their commitment to bringing their requests to God in prayer. Rather than seeking freedom from anxiety through self-mastery, Paul's admonition presumes that freedom from anxiety comes only through prayerful, grateful acknowledgment of dependence on God.

Stephen Fowl¹

¹ Philippians: A Two Horizons Commentary, Kindle Edition, 2559.

Discussion Guide

Philippians 4:1-7

Opening Question

What makes you anxious?

Read Philippians 4:1-7

Reading Questions

Why do you think it is so important to Paul that Euodia and Syntechē get a long?

Paul again returns to theme of joy. What role is joy to have in the Christian's life?

Trace Paul's language about anxiety, prayer, and peace in 4:6-7. What is the relationship between these three things?

Discipleship Questions

In what practical ways can we as Christians today let our gentleness be evident to all?

How has anxiety affected your life? Do you think Paul's teaching on anxiety is helpful? Why or why not?

Practical Philippians

Anxiety check. Take time to be still this week. Find a quiet place where no one can disturb you. Take a deep breath and come before the Lord. Bring before the Lord all the things that are making you anxious one by one. On each thing keep it before the Lord until you feel the anxiety leave. Finish your prayer in the peace of God and praise him for his faithfulness.

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 4:8-13

Introduction

Paul continues his final thoughts by transitioning into a virtue list before returning to his final personal reflections. Once again, the audience is reminded that not only is Paul surviving his imprisonment, but God is actually using his imprisonment for his betterment. For the last time in the letter Paul speaks about joy. This time his joy ("rejoice") is based in the Philippian churches expressing their concern for Paul. Yet, Paul accentuates again what he has expressed throughout the letter: his present circumstances do not determine his well-being. Regardless of what comes his way Paul affirms, "I can do all this through whom who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13).

The Secret to Being Content

Paul says that no matter his circumstances he has "learned to be content" (4:11). The word translated content is *autarkes* and this is the only time it is used in the NT though a closely related word, *autarkeia*, is found in 2 Cor. 9:8 and 1 Tim 6:6. It means to be "without need" or "sufficient in one's self." This was a commonly used concept by Greek Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle Diogenes, and Socrates, who sought contentment as a highest good. With these teachers in mind, Paul proposes the secret to contentment is something different. What then is Paul's secret to being content? It is exclusive identity in Christ. For Paul, personal achievement, wealth, or social standing is worth nothing. These qualities, which we ourselves so often strive for, left him a murderous, self-righteous zealot, but in Christ he has found death and resurrection from his old self. He continues to share daily in this death and understands his whole being as sustained by the same power that raised Christ from the dead. Present circumstances will never dictate Paul's character, well-being, or desires. Instead, the imprisoned, scarred, physically frail Paul says adamantly, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Devotional

One of the things my motorcycle training instructor taught during the class and accentuated time and time again was that you will drift or direct a motorcycle with your body unintentionally towards what you are looking at. For instance, if there is a large pothole in the middle of the road and you want to avoid it, do not stare at the pothole. If you do you will find yourself fight the motorcycle to keep from going into the pothole. Instead, you are to lift your eyes up and look towards where you want to go to avoid obstacles. I think this is a good metaphor for our Christian journey. So often, in our attempts to overcome sin or avoid sin we become fixated on that sin and cannot help ourselves in avoiding it. Christians spend too much time worrying and thinking about sinfulness. This often leads to the very sinfulness we are trying to avoid. Paul teaches instead that we are to focus on the goodness of the Christian life. Rather than think about sin and its consequences or our past failures Paul says, "what 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 thing" (4:8). The focus of our minds are to be on the honorable things of God, while the peace of God is guarding our hearts!

Memory Verse:

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

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Virtue List

Listing virtues was a common practice in Greek rhetoric. The rhetorician would commonly use the lists either in description of a virtuous person or as aspirations for the young to live a virtuous life. Paul lists virtues that would commonly be found in other rhetoricians list. What sets them apart for the Christ is Paul's contention that these qualities stem from relationship with Jesus. Rather than being achievable goals in a person's life found through self-discipline or asceticism, these virtues derive from imitating Paul as he imitates Jesus (4:9). Still Paul was intentional in choosing his six virtues, each of which carried a distinct idea in the mind of his audience:

True - (Gk. *Alethes*). Though this was a commonly debated Greek concept, Paul makes it clear that truth derives from God (1:18) and was a primary revelatory purpose of Jesus' incarnation (John 8:13-14, et al.)

Noble - (Gk. *Semnos*). This word is used to describe a person who is revered for their character. Paul uses it as an important Christian quality for deacons (1 Tim. 3:8), deaconesses (1 Tim. 3:11), and older men (Tit. 2:2). Interestingly enough, Diogenes describes Socrates as being content (Gk. *Autarxes*) and noble (gk. *Semnos*).

Right - (Gk. *Dikaios*). This commonly used word can mean just, right, or, even, righteous. This word was used by Romans to refer to the upstanding citizen or person who adhered to the laws.

Pure - (Gk. *Agnos*). Likewise, this commonly used biblical word means that which is clean. It is connected at its root to the same word for holy (Gk. *Agios*). In the LXX it referred to that which has integrity and in Greek culture referred to someone who performed their duties in office blamelessly.

Lovely - (Gk. *Prophiles*). Unlike the previous two words, this is the only occurrence of this word in the NT and unlike all the previous words, this is the first word that does not innately refer to moral character. *Prophiles* comes from the combination of *pros* (meaning to or towards) and *philew* (meaning to love). It simply means something with lovely aesthetics. It refers to anything worth admiring because of its beauty.

Admirable - (Gk. *Euphemos*). Again, this is the only occurrence of this word in the NT. It literally means that which sounds well or sounds good. Like its predecessor, this word refers more to the aesthetic value with an auditory leaning. The best translation might be that which is spoken well of.

Text Notes

4:9 - "God of Peace" (Gk. *theos tes erienes*). In 4:7, Paul says that the "peace of God will guard your hearts and minds." Just two short verses later, following his poetic virtue list, Paul returns to peace but this time the phrase is flipped. Instead of the peace of God it is now the God of peace. This probably helps to clarify v. 7 in that it is not God's distinct characteristic, peace, that is at work, but truly God himself.

4:10 - "concern," "concerned," (Gk. *phronein*). Literally, "to have in mind." Once again in this passage Paul returns to one of his central themes throughout the letter and uses the Greek word *phonein* twice in this verse. The Philippian Christians have Paul "in mind" because he has had them in his mind (1:7). They are like-minded in this just as they are likeminded with Christ (2:2, 5; 3:15).

¹ Wendell Willis, "The Shaping of Character: Virtue in Philippians 4:8-9" *Restoration Quarterly* 54:2 (2012).

Quotable

This character instruction in Phil 4:8-9 includes what has "excellence" in itself and what is "praised" by people. These instructions offer guidelines "to be taken into account" in shaping life. But most significantly Paul instructs Christians on how to act on these ideals by setting forth his own teachings and life as a reliable example, just as he sets forth Christ as a paradigm in 2:6-11, Timothy in 2:19-22 and Epaphroditus in 2:25-30... The Philippians can learn the proper meaning of popular commendatory words by observing the teachings and the life of their founder. The ongoing role of Paul as a community founder and shaper is the key point of these verses."

Wendell Willis

Discussion Guide

Philippians 4:8-13

Opening Question

What is your “go to jam” aka your favorite song?

Read Philippians 4:8-13

Reading Questions

Which of the characteristics listed in 4:8 catches your attention and why?

How would you describe Paul’s present circumstances?

What does the entire letter to the Philippians teach us is Paul’s secret of being content?

Discipleship Questions

What elements of our culture and worldview keep us from living content lives?

What is the secret to being content in our lives today?

Practical Philippians

Virtue List. Take a minute and read through the virtues listed in 4:8. Think about and hold in your mind something for each one of those virtues. For example, “whatever is lovely” might spur you to think about your vase of flowers. “Whatever is pure” might spur you to think about your grandchildren. Pray for contentment as you focus on each one.

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Notes & Quotes

Philippians 4:14-23

Introduction

Finally, we come to the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Philippians. He thanks the Philippian church for their gift (4:14-19), gives glory to God (4:20), and closes with traditional Greco-Roman greetings (4:21-23). We learn a few small things from this section about Paul's circumstances. He is not alone (4:21) and is surrounded by believers "who belong to Caesar's household" (4:22). As mentioned previously, this might refer to Roman officials or, simply, Roman soldiers. As we reflect on the letter as a whole, what were some major themes or take-aways?

Joy - Undoubtedly, Philippians is a letter of joy. Paul calls upon the church in Philippi repeatedly to rejoice together with him.

Present Circumstances - Time and time again, Paul points out that his present circumstances never dictate his eternal standing, current attitude, or life-long virtue. This letter maybe more than any other in the NT deals specifically with this issue.

Fellowship - As discussed on the other side of the notes, *koinonia* is a primary theme for Paul as Christian participate with one another in communion with Christ.

Citizenship - Paul routinely uses political language to describe the Christians status in God's kingdom. By invoking citizenship language, Paul reframes his audience's identity.

Christ Jesus - As in all his letter, Paul centers everything around the Gospel of Jesus: his life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Identity Formation - The entire letter is a kind of ode to identity formation in Christ. How does the Christian have joy and fellowship regardless of their present circumstances? Only because their identity, their citizenship is entirely found in and gained in Christ. Just as Paul longs to know Christ, so the Christian believer follows his example in this longing.

Devotional

When I was a young my mother daily embedded a type of thinking into my identity through simple correction. I would say, "I need a new bike." She would correct, "You mean you want a new bike." In a similar way today, my wife corrects our children. They say in a whine, "I need some water." She corrects them, "how do you ask? May I please have some water?... Now say Thank-you." Our relationship with God reflects these two stories. We pray to God for all the things we *need* when in reality they are what we *want*. Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:19, "My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." The issue isn't whether God will meet our needs, but how we understand what we truly need. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus lines out many of our needs: daily bread, forgiveness, guidance, deliverance. These are the genuine needs of our lives. Like my wife is teaching our children, it also matters how we ask and appreciate those needs. Maybe my kids do need water, but my wife is teaching them to ask politely and receive graciously. So it is with our relationship with God. We too often believe that we are self-sufficient in what we need. Yet, God is always the supreme giver as creator and sustainer of all things. In fact, Paul says the way God meets our needs is through "the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." In other words it cost God the sacrifice of his son to meet our needs. Without Christ's sacrificial glory there is no forgiveness, guidance, or deliverance. Our response then is clear, "thank you."

Memory Verse:

"My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."

4:19

SECRET *of* BEING CONTENT

Theme: Fellowship

Paul thanks the Philippian church by saying “it was good of you to share in my troubles” (4:13). The word translated “share” is *sunkoinoneo*. This is the root word *koinonia* combined with the prefix *sun*. The root word *koinonia* is a commonly used word in the NT to refer to Christian fellowship, communion, or participation, and the prefix *sun* means “with.” *Koinonia* describes the character of the church in Acts 2:42 and continues to describe the hopeful character of the Christian assembly throughout the NT. Paul uses this endearing term in his letter to the Philippians to describe his relationship with them and the Christians relationship with Christ. As has been a constant theme throughout Philippians, life in Christ is life with one another in fellowship of the Gospel (1:5), fellowship of the Spirit (2:1), and Fellowship of suffering (3:10). Paul uses some form of the word *koinonia* six times in Philippians (1:5, 7; 2:1; 3:10; 4:14, 15).

Though translating this word as fellowship is helpful, it is still a bit lacking in regards to the depth of what Paul means when he uses this word. As the late scholar John Gordon Davies concludes in his magnificent study of this word, “*koinonia* involves organic unity and to interpret it merely in terms of ‘fellowship’ is misleading. The *koinonia* of Christ is the participation in the very being of the God-man, and it involves sharing His life. To partake of Christ is indeed to partake of His life.”¹

Gift Giving

Many scholars have noted that in closing his letter Paul uses technical language revolving around the social norms of giving and receiving. Gift giving in the Greco-Roman world was a complex system based in the culture of honor and shame that involved social status and expectations. The receiver of the gift was seen as socially inferior unless they could offer something in exchange of greater value. Gifts were never given without some expectation of reciprocity and, often, indentured gratitude if the receiver could not reciprocate. Thus, Paul throughout his ministry is adamantly opposed to entering into a relationship where he routinely received financial gifts from supporting churches. Why is it then that Paul receives the gift presented to him from the church in Phillipi? There are three reasons that seem most likely. First, as a prisoner Paul was unable to take care of himself, and Roman prisoners were not provided food and necessities by the government itself. Paul might simply be in such dire need that he reluctantly accepts the gifts. His language seems inclined this way as he talks about knowing what it means to be in need. Second, Paul might not want to bring shame upon the church by rejecting the gift that had gone to such great lengths to provide to him. Finally, with Epaphroditus's near death experience in providing the gift, Paul finds it best in the circumstances to accept the gift. He again specifically mentions Epaphroditus (4:18). In any case, Paul tentatively and cautiously receives the gift while also making it adamantly known that he only receives the gift that it might be added to the Philippian church's account before God and because they have received the greatest gift, that of the Gospel, through Paul. Paul even seems to transition the meaning and purpose of the gift. He specifically uses temple sacrifice language to describe the character of the gift. He says, “they are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (4:18). In using this language, Paul intentionally transfers the receiver of the gift from himself to God. The gifts aren't really given to Paul, but to God himself who can never be out given.

Text Notes

4:17 - “gift” (Gk. *doma*). Though this word means gift, it is an unusual word for Paul to use in describing this gift. It is only used three other times in the NT and each are in quoting the OT (Mat 7:11; Luke 11:13; Eph 4:8). The usual word for gift is *xaris*.

¹ John Gordon Davies, *Members One of Another: Aspects of Koinonia*, 9.

² Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Epistles*, 137.

Quotable

This The letter ends with greetings, grace and glory: greetings to and from within the church; the grace of the Lord and king, Jesus himself, freely available to all his people; but, as always, glory to the one true God, the father, for ever and ever. Paul adds 'Amen', and his hope would be that we today would do so too.

Tom Wright²

Discussion Guide

Philippians 4:14-23

Opening Question

What is the best gift you've ever been given and who gave it to you?

Read Philippians 4:14-23

Reading Questions

Why is Paul so reluctant to simply praise the Philippians for their gift?

What catches your eye in the closing of the letter and why?

Discipleship Questions

What would you say are the major themes of Philippians?

What is one thing you have learned from this study in Philippians?

How has reading Paul's letter to the Philippians helped you come to "know Christ and be found in him?"

Practical Philippians

Read it. I'll say it again, read it! Having methodically worked through Philippians, now sit down and read it one more time all the way through from start to finish without taking a break.

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