

# Route Sixty-Six

*Part Fifty*

*Philippians*

*Righteousness From God by Faith  
(John 5:39; Philippians 4:11-13)*

*With Study Questions*

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**Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: <sup>12</sup>I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11-13).**

## **Introduction**

Numerous times I have communicated how difficult a calling it would have been to be the pastor at the church in Corinth. The challenges for the pastors, elders and deacons of that church would have made it far from enjoyable. Conversely, if I had to pick a church in the New Testament that appears to have been a joy to a minister, it might be Philippi.

This first church on European soil is basically receiving a thank you note from the Apostle Paul. No doubt, as we shall see, there is valuable ministerial instruction contained in Philippians. But Paul is essentially thanking them for their support in the labors of ministry while he is in prison. One gets the impression that this church held up the apostle's arms and were a great source of encouragement and objection of affection.

**For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:8).**

Although it should not be the heart of ministry and, most certainly, can be the root of much evil, as with Judas (John 12:6), economics is a component of Christian service. The Philippians were generous, and Paul gratefully received their support, unlike the different-natured Corinthians whose support was something Paul did not require of them. It is a great honor from God to support that which is a noble cause.

All this to say, that Philippians is the least dogmatic of all Paul's letters. There is very little in the way of harsh rebukes or severe warnings.

Recurrent ideas involve joy, God's power in seeing us through our Christian journey, learning by each other's example and the general richness of the Christian life.

## **A Survey of Philippians**

The letter opens with Paul greeting the saints in Philippi along with bishops (elders) and deacons. The modern west has embraced a very casual disposition about what constitutes a church. Arguments against organized churches will often point out how the church in the New Testament often met in homes rather than church buildings.

Of course, where a church meets is not the defining element of whether or not it is a church. But churches without elders and deacons are not meeting the New Covenant definition of how a church is to be structured. Churches should have elders and deacons.

Paul rapidly and encouragingly moves to encouraging his readers of their ultimate victory and the reason for it. Paul was...

**...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).**

The true Christian will persevere (and abound as in 1:9), because he/she is preserved by the love and power of God.

Paul, who is in prison for his faith, will convey early in this letter how the apparent outward antagonism is no indicator of gospel failure but rather...

**...have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1:12b).**

It is generally ascribed to Tertullian that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" whilst arguing against the oppression of the Roman Empire. Perhaps more accurately translated, "We multiply when you read us. The blood of Christians is seed." Like so many other notions contained in the faith, we like the idea of it until it is our own blood. It seems as if there are fewer and fewer willing to pay the price-to become His living pulpits and our lives incarnate sermons.

Paul realizes that not everyone preaching the gospel is doing so from pure motives. It would seem we have good reason to question the sincerity of those who, either financially or politically, have a lot to gain by putting on a good religious show. Paul will apparently leave that final judgment up to God.

**What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice (Philippians 1:18).**

It has been suggested that chapter can be summed in verse twenty-one.

**For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain (Philippians 1:21).**

So assured Paul was, so confident of his place of peace in heaven, that he viewed his time in this life as a sort of utility. As long as I am of value here, God will keep me here. But I do not bemoan His taking me when He sees fit. An initial response to this might be to feel slighted that this world (along with the people we love) so easily displaced. But it is just the opposite.

You will never receive a greater love than a love from a saint whose heart, focus, peace and fountain is the grace of God in Christ. But how does one attain what Paul seemed to have. It is through that which forms the heart of chapter two-the mind of Christ.

**Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, <sup>2</sup>fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:1-4).**

And the example Paul uses for our Christ-mindedness was His willingness, though God, to empty Himself. Not only did the eternal Son

of God become flesh, He was obedient to the point of death. And not a noble death, but death on a cross-an ignominious, shameful death. This is the mind that Christians are called to have.

It is quite difficult and counter-intuitive to dismiss that 'what's in it for me' attitude-even when we walk into the doors of the church. And since inherent selfishness is so weaved into the human psyche, there is a great temptation for those in the ministry (myself included) to cater to this. It is directly after this call to self-humbling that Paul offers a somewhat puzzling statement.

**...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;<sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure (Philippians 2:12a, 13).**

We are not working for our salvation. We are working out our salvation. It's almost as if Paul, knowing the great difficulty we will have in this pursuit, that he informs us of something very extraordinary accompanying the efforts of Christian faithfulness. Be encouraged, knowing God is at work in you.

In chapter one we learned that to live is Christ. In chapter two we are to have the mind of Christ. In chapter three we see a goal-a pressing on to know Christ more fully. We are to know the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. It is complete and utter identity in Christ. Paul's approach to this is to remove the clutter which wars against it. To take, as it were, out the trash. And in Paul's mind, the trash is his resume'; the very things that would elevate him to the top tier of the religious community.

He fulfilled all the religious requirements. He was from the right family. He performed the faithful works. He was the poster-boy for religious perfection. But he had become a hoarder. He viewed these plaques and trophies as refuse. The religious and ethical medals around his neck were choking him. They were millstones rather than medals. Christian faithfulness becomes evident, not only in what we have, but in what we're willing jettison-which, for Paul were all things.

**But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.<sup>8</sup> Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for**

**whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:7, 8).**

It can be very difficult to throw things out; especially things we think our entire sense of self and value revolve around. Pride and undue love of ourselves are among the attributes of apostasy (2 Timothy 3:2). It is quite unlike the emptying of self we saw in the second chapter. But Paul's emptying of self was not a matter of leaving his soul with a vacancy. He did not evict a demon and leave his house swept, clean and empty—a perfect abode for seven other demons (Matthew 12:43-45).

Paul, as it were, made a trade. There are few verses in Scripture which encapsulate the heart of the gospel better than the one where Paul enunciates this trade. It is Paul's goal, as it should be for every believer, to...

**...be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Philippians 3:9).**

It's been said that he is not fool who gives up what he cannot keep, in order to gain what he cannot lose. Paul was no fool. His eyes had been open to the feeble nature of his own righteousness and the sinless perfection of His Savior, freely given to him through faith—"the righteousness which is from God by faith." There may be no more significant question to ask yourself than if this is the righteousness in which you will be found.

In one respect there is an ease and comfort to this doctrine. Truly, and with great accuracy, did Jesus teach:

**Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).**

Yet at the same time, we wonder how His followers interpreted these words when being burned in gardens and eaten by animals for entertainment. Make no mistake, peace with God (for which Christ carries

the burden-the context of this teaching) is often accompanied by a lack of peace with the world.

It may be for this reason that we move from Christ at the believer's *life* to having the *mind* of Christ to the *goal* of knowing Christ more fully to Christ as the believer's *strength*.

Though he will crescendo with contentment and strength, Paul begins his final chapter with one of the more comforting and powerful passages on prayer we see in all of Scripture.

**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup> and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6, 7).**

Anxiety should set the alarm in our hearts for prayer. We pray with thanksgiving since we know God will respond according to His own **"riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:29)**. And in this spiritual war, again, where Paul will move to strength in Christ, prayer leads to the peace of God, a sort of sentry, guarding our hearts and minds through Christ.

And, as if to aid us in this peace, we are counseled in terms of the directions of our very thoughts. Keeping in mind that Paul is writing from prison.

**Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. <sup>9</sup> The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:8, 9).**

Can we in all truth, if we were to canvas the inventory of our own minds, offer a record of noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous items that have subdued us to the point of meditation?

An old story is told about a grandfather seeking to teach his grandson lessons in life. The old man was honest when he told the young

man of a fight within his own mind and heart. He said it was like having two wolves inside of him. One is evil. He is full of anger, envy, jealousy, lewdness, greed, arrogance, resentment and pride. The other is good. He is full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The grandson asked, "which one wins?" The old man answered, "The one you feed."

At the same time, it would appear that true, godly strength is preceded by a contentment, recognizing God's hand in all our challenges. Again, it is Paul in prison who wrote:

**Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: <sup>12</sup> I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Philippians 4:11, 12).**

From whence does such godly contentment spring? Paul provides the answer.

**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).**

Calvin offers wonderful words on this well-known verse. And we will finish with this.

**As he had boasted of things that were very great, in order that this might not be attributed to pride or furnish others with occasion of foolish boasting, he adds, that it is by Christ that he is endowed with this fortitude. "I can do all things," says he, "but it is in Christ, not by my own power, for it is Christ that supplies me with strength." Hence we infer, that Christ will not be less strong and invincible in us also, if, conscious of our own weakness, we place reliance upon his power alone.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Philippians* (electronic ed., Php 4:13). Albany, OR: Ages Software.



## Questions for Study

1. How is Philippians different than many of Paul's other epistles (pages 2, 3)?
2. What makes a church a church? Specifically, how does Paul's greeting help us in the defining elements of a church (page 3)?
3. How can you have confidence that you will persevere in the faith (page 3)?
4. Paul was writing from prison. Did he think that was hindering the advancement of the gospel? Explain (pages 3, 4).
5. The apostle wrote that "to live is Christ and to die is gain." Does that mean he didn't care about people or this life at all (page 4)?
6. Can you give an example of what it means to have the mind of Christ (pages 4, 5)?
7. Does "work out your salvation" imply working to be saved? Why or why not (page 4)?
8. How did Paul view his own righteousness? What was he willing to trade it for (pages 5, 6)?
9. How does one find strength in Christ (pages 7, 8)?