

PHILIPPIANS

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Lecture Notes



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Pressing On: A Study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

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"Pressing on" describes the basic thrust of Paul's epistle to the Philippians. In every chapter, there is a verse or two of exhortation to push ahead in the Christian faith. Consider the following verses: (1) 1:12, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened to unto me having fallen out rather unto the **furtherance** (*prokopen*, from *prokopto* "to drive forward") of the gospel;" (2) 1:27, "that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind **striving together** (*sunathleo*, "to contend together with," "to exert oneself with") for the faith of the gospel;" (3) 2:12, "**work out** (*katergazomai*, "to carry out a task until it is finished") your own salvation with fear and trembling; (4) 2:16, "**Holding forth** (*epecho*, "to hold onto tightly") the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain;" (5) 3:14, "I **press** (*dioko*, "to pursue relentlessly") toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;" and (6) 4:9, "These things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, **do** (*prasso*, "to practise repeatedly, continually, habitually"): and the God of peace shall be with you."

One cannot help but get a sense of urgency in Paul's tone. Time is not on our side. Death could come at any moment. Christ might return real soon. There is thus no time to waste. Paul exhibited the work ethic of Christ, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

I: Press On in Preaching the Gospel

1. Opening Greeting (Phil 1:1-2)

1.1. Addresser and Addressees (1:1)

Paul and Timothy introduced themselves here as "servants" of Jesus Christ. There are two words for "servants:" (1) *diakonos* (v2, "deacons"), and (2) *doulos* (lit "bond-slave"). The second is used here. It has the idea of ownership. A bond-slave is a slave who has totally given up his freedom to do the will of his master. In the OT, such a slave does so willingly and happily (Exod 21:2, 5-6—"If thou

buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. ... And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.”). Paul and Timothy considered themselves to be such “servants” or “slaves” of Christ, their Saviour-Master. It is significant to note that Paul was at this time in a Roman prison (see 1:13). Paul was completely given over to do His Master’s will and bidding. He was prepared to be imprisoned for the sake of Christ, even to die for Him. He was not so much bound by Caesar, but to Christ and His Gospel.

Although Paul mentioned Timothy in the opening salutation, he alone was responsible for the epistle (see singular verb and pronouns in 1:3-4, 2:19-23. It is possible that Timothy was Paul’s secretary here—Paul dictated, Timothy wrote). Paul mentioned Timothy because the Philippian church knew him well. He was there when the church was founded (Acts 16:1-12) and had subsequent contacts with them (Acts 19:22, 20:3-6). Furthermore, Paul would send Timothy to them soon to take care of their spiritual needs (2:19).

Paul wrote the letter to the church in Philippi which he found in his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 16:8-40). The Spirit directed him there by a Macedonian vision. Philippi was the principal city of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). As a busy commercial centre, it was a most suitable place to establish a church; there were lots of people—residents, businessmen, and travelers. (Paul evidently targeted major cities in his evangelistic work. Perhaps one biblical strategy of missions is to evangelise the big cities first). Lydia a businesswoman dealing with purple dye, was the first to be saved. Later the Philippian jailor and his family got saved. These had formed the core for the new church in Philippi, and its membership has grown since then.

Paul called the Philippian believers “saints” (lit “holy/sanctified ones”). This of course does not mean sinless perfection. Christians though regenerated, still possess the

sinful nature. Nonetheless, as “saints” they are positionally sanctified. They are sanctified “in Christ.” They have been imputed with the righteousness of Christ. Christ has earned righteousness for His saints by His active obedience—by keeping the Law perfectly on their behalf (Matt 5:17-18, Gal 4:4-5).

The Philippian church evidently grew and matured for now they had “bishops (*episkopois*) and deacons (*diakonois*).” The “bishops” (lit, “overseers”) refer to the presbyters or elders (cf Tit 1:5-7). The word “elder” designates the office, and *episkopos* or “overseer” denotes its function. Secondary officers in the church are called deacons whose role is that of service (ie, taking care of the physical aspects of church ministry) (see Acts 6:1-7).

One thing is striking in this epistolary introduction. Paul demoted himself and all others, and promoted Christ alone. Note that the names of Paul, Timothy, and the Philippians appear only once each, but Christ is mentioned thrice. Paul, Timothy and the Philippians when cited were cited with Christ. In other words, servants of God are nothing and can do nothing without Christ (John 15:4-5). Never boast like this pastor of a certain large church in Singapore, “My tireless work led it to grow by more than 500 percent in the previous five years.” Only Christ should receive all glory and honour. As John the baptiser said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

1.2. Blessing (1:2)

The Apostle Paul blessed his readers with grace and peace. Grace is unmerited favour bestowed upon all believers by virtue of Christ’s redemptive life and cross work. Peace is a product of that grace. A sinner saved by grace is no longer an enemy but a friend of God. “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Such reconciliation brings about a Father-son relationship. A Christian is blessed with the privilege of calling God “Abba, Father” (Rom 5:10; 8:16-17).

2. Thanksgiving, Desire, and Prayer (Phil 1:3-11)

2.1. Thanksgiving (1:3-6)

Paul begins his epistle by thanking God for the Philippians. He has fond memories of the church. He prays for them with joy. Their “fellowship in the gospel” has brought him much encouragement. The word for “fellowship” here is the Greek *koinonia* which has the idea of active partnership and participation. It involves a genuine sharing of thoughts, of feelings, and of goods. The Philippian church was very supportive of his ministry since the beginning. In Phil 4:15-16, Paul expresses his appreciation for their financial support time and time again. No other church had consistently provided for him the way they did after he left Macedonia.

Their giving towards the gospel ministry evinces the sincerity of the faith and love for Christ. Paul is fully assured that God who has saved them will save them to the very end. God promises to preserve His people till the day of Christ’s return. When God begins a good work of salvation in us, He will make sure to complete it. None of His saints would be lost. God’s salvation comes with a foolproof, lifetime guarantee that does not expire (cf John 10:28-29, Rom 8:28-39).

2.2. Desire (1:7-8)

Paul esteemed the Philippians very highly. It is difficult to express in words the thoughts and feelings Paul had for the Philippians; they welled up from deep within his innermost being (see v8). His ties with the Philippians were so tightly knitted that he considered them to be his fellow prisoners. Paul was not in prison for any crime that he had committed, but for the sake of Christ and His Gospel. He was imprisoned for “the defence and confirmation of the gospel.” Paul employed legal terminology when he spoke of “defence” (*apologia*; cf Acts 22:1; 25:16; 2 Tim 4:16), and “confirmation” (*bebaiōsis*; cf Phil 1:7; Heb 6:16). Paul

intimated that in his upcoming trial before Caesar, he would be presenting clear evidences for the truth of the gospel.

2.3. Prayer (1:9-11)

Paul prayed for the continued spiritual growth of the Philippian Christians. He desired that this virtue of self-sacrificing love (*agape*) that the Philippians had displayed would increase in every way always.

Love must be based on a “knowledge” and “judgement” that is defined by the truth of God’s Word. “Knowledge” (*epignōsis*) has to do with the content of faith. It refers to an intelligent perception of God’s Word that powerfully influences personal conduct (cf Eph 1:17; 4:13; Col 1:9, 10; 2:2; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7). “Judgement” (*aisthēsis*) here concerns the exercise of faith. It speaks of the wise application of God’s Word by discerning right from wrong, good from evil, truth from error (cf Prov 1:7, Heb 5:14). The wise application of God’s Word also involves putting matters to the test so that we might make the best decision and adopt the best course of action. That which is good or legitimate, may not necessarily be better or best (cf 1 Cor 10:23).

Such a truthful and wise exercise of love will put believers in a good stead when they give an account of their deeds before Christ at His Judgement Seat (2 Cor 5:10). The prospect of being judged one day by Christ insofar as service is concerned has a purifying effect on a believer’s life (1 John 3:3). The Lord is looking for “the fruits of righteousness” which is another term for “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23). Every Christian should bear the fruits of righteousness produced by the Spirit which will redound to the glory of God in Christ (Eph 1:6, 12, 14). Indeed, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” (WSC Q1).

3. Reasons for Imprisonment (Phil 1:12-26)

3.1. Advancement of Kingdom (Phil 1:12-18)

Was Paul's imprisonment in Rome something detrimental to the gospel ministry? Paul wanted the Philippians to understand that though he was bound, the gospel was not. God had allowed Paul to be imprisoned so that the gospel could reach even the heart of the Roman Empire (Acts 23:11)—even the “palace” (*praetorio*). The word “palace” here probably refers to the praetorian guards. These were the imperial guards stationed in Caesar's palace. They were an elite troop (equivalent to our commandos), 10,000 strong, and highly trained. Roman citizens who appealed to Caesar for trial would be guarded by them (cf Acts 22:25-29; 25:10-12).

Paul did not feel sorry for himself when he was imprisoned. He understood the will of God. He preached the gospel to those imperial soldiers who took turns to watch over him. Not only was the gospel preached to the praetorian guards, but also to the Jewish community in Rome (Acts 28:17-24), and we know that at least one Gentile—Onesimus—was saved during Paul's imprisonment (Philem 10).

Paul set an example. His imprisonment for the sake of Christ and His Word had instilled courage in many Roman Christians to evangelise openly. Instead of going into hiding, the believers did the exact opposite. This open show of courage was not some fleeting enthusiasm; they kept on speaking the Word publicly without fear.

Phil 1:15-18 is one of the proof texts of ecumenical evangelists. Is Paul here advocating cooperative evangelism with Romanists, modernists, charismatics, and neo-evangelicals? Let us study this passage very carefully.

Paul tells us that the preachers of Christ are of two types. There are those who preach Christ because of “envy and strife,” and there were those who do so on account of “good will.” It is important to note that Paul is talking about the *motives* and not the *content* of their preaching. These Christians preached “Christ” (vv15, 17, 18), and not “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4), or “another gospel” (Gal 1:6). To preachers of “another Jesus” and “another gospel,” Paul had only words of condemnation and not commendation. If indeed false preachers were described here, it would be very uncharacteristic of Paul to say that “Christ is preached” (v18). It would also be contradictory of Paul to address such false preachers as “brothers” in verse 14, and then call them

“dogs,” and “evil workers” in 3:2. Evidently Paul did not consider these people to be false preachers.

The first group of preachers is said to be doing their work out of “envy and strife.” The word “envy” (*phthonon*) denotes ill will towards another person who holds an advantage. The word “strife” (*erin*) refers to conflict arising from rivalry or discord. “Envy” addresses the inward disposition, while “strife” the outward expression of the sinful attitude we all know as jealousy. These men were probably leaders of the Roman church, and commanded the respect of their members. They apparently felt threatened by Paul’s presence. An inferiority complex perhaps developed. So, they started preaching Christ to prove that they were better or more effective preachers than Paul. They preached with a selfish ambition to glorify themselves. They were playing politics.

The second group of preachers is described as serving out of “a good will” (*eudokias*). This word refers to a desire of doing something out of one’s own heart, to perform a task that pleases another. It is the opposite of “envy and strife.” These preachers were selfless in their work of evangelism. Their zeal for the gospel was purely motivated by their love for the Lord, and sincere desire to encourage Paul.

Paul in no way felt threatened by those who preached with wrong motives, who tried to overshadow him. He was a magnanimous man. He had no quarrel with those scheming individuals. He saw no reason why he should be irritated by them, nor was there any reason for him to retaliate against them. As far as Paul was concerned, as long as Christ was preached truthfully, he was happy; as long as the gospel message was not impugned in any way, he was not worried. So he said, “only that in every way, whether in pretence (ie, bad motive) or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (v18).

Therefore, Paul was not encouraging a kind of cooperative evangelism where truth is compromised. Paul was willing to tolerate his opposing brethren because the issue involved motive and not doctrine. Calvin rightly said, “this impurity was in the mind, and did not shew itself in doctrine, ... Paul assuredly would have felt no pleasure in seeing the gospel corrupted; yet he declares that he rejoices in the preaching of those persons, while it

was not simple or sincere.” This passage thus cannot be used as a proof text for ecumenical evangelism.

3.2. Deliverance for Further Ministry (Phil 1:19-26)

Paul believed that his gospel ministry would not end in Rome. The church had been praying for him. The Holy Spirit had supplied him with the grace he needed to go through the hardships of his imprisonment. He expected a soon release, and anticipated visiting the Philippians again for their spiritual benefit (vv24-26).

As far as Paul was concerned, his only goal, whether dead or alive, was that Christ might be highly exalted in his body. Paul wanted his body to be a living sacrifice unto God (Rom 12:1-2). Verse 20 is a famous text: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” That was Paul’s motto. Do note that Paul was not contrasting between life and death, Christ and gain here. To Paul, life is Christ, death is also Christ. In other words, “to live is Christ, to die is more Christ.” It is more Christ, because it means entering into God’s rest, and Christ’s very presence (cf 2 Cor 5:8). That was why Paul struggled with wanting to remain on earth or to depart to heaven. Remaining on earth to work for Christ is good indeed, but departing to be with Christ “is far better” (v23). Nevertheless, he knew God’s will for him at this juncture, which was to abide in the flesh. He was needed in the church (v24). He himself was desirous of advancing the spiritual growth and deepening the Christian joy of the Philippian saints (v25). So he eagerly looked forward to seeing them (v26).

II: Press On in Defending the Faith

4. Sermons on Unity, Humility, and Salvation (Phil 1:27-2:18)

4.1. Unity (Phil 1:27-30)

Christians should reflect the character-transforming power of the gospel of Christ in their life. Paul commanded the Philippian Christians to “live as citizens” (*politeuesthe*) of the kingdom of God. Although the Philippians possessed Roman citizenship which carried with it certain privileges (Acts 16:12, 20, 21), they ought to

bear in mind that they had a much more honourable citizenship—a spiritual citizenship—in Christ Jesus their almighty King and Lord (Phil 3:20).

As the Roman army conquered the world as a united force, so should the Christian church steadfastly battle against her enemies with one spirit and one mind. Paul enjoined all Christians to unite in thought and action. It goes without saying that Christian unity must find its basis on the Truth of God's Word. Christians are to contend hand in hand for "the faith of the gospel" (v27 cf Jude 3). This "faith" is the objective faith (ie the Christian Faith, the Body of Truth, the Word of God). Unity is strength. The Church would be much more effective in proclaiming the gospel and defending the faith if they did so as a united army of Christ grounded on His Truth.

Paul encouraged the believers not to be afraid of their enemies. Their foes are defeated foes. In Christ victory is already won. The holy courage displayed by believers in the midst of suffering and persecution proves their truly regenerate state. Their enemies may kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul. God will one day resurrect the bodies of the saints. The enemies of Christ appear victorious, but their victory is indeed hollow. Their rebellion against Christ points to their ultimate destruction by His hands on the day of judgement. Knowing that the victory is already won, let us then press on to "earnestly contend for the faith which was delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

4.2. Humility (Phil 2:1-11)

Christians are called to fight a common enemy, not each other. Paul warned against divisiveness. He enjoined the Philippians to be likeminded—to have the same mind that is produced by the same Lord and Spirit, worked out by a common love for Christ and one another. Dr Homer Kent rightly observed, "Paul's command for the Philippians to be likeminded "was not a command for unity at the expense of truth. It assumes that 'the same thing' is also 'the right thing.'"

Paul rejoiced that the Philippians in Rome were preaching the gospel though some did so out of envy and strife (Phil 1:15-16). Against such a divisive attitude of contention, he wrote, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of

mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil 2:3-4). In this age of *self*-esteem, Paul taught the opposite—*other*-esteem: "let each esteem other better than themselves." The doctrine of self-esteem as taught by James Dobson, Robert Schuller, Josh McDowell et al is unbiblical and dangerous. Self-esteem's maxim is "You cannot love another person unless you love yourself." Is this true? Where in the Bible does it teach that we must first love ourselves before we are able to love others? It was precisely because of vainglory or self-love that certain members of the Philippian church preached the gospel with a divisive spirit of envy and strife. Self-esteem tore the church apart. Paul's antidote was other-esteem. Paul tells us to "consider others better than ourselves." In other words, we must be selfless, not selfish, not self first but others first (Rom 12:10). Someone has observed that English grammar reflects the selfish attitude of the world. In English the 1st person is "I," 2nd person is "you," and 3rd person is "he." But Christian grammar is totally reverse: 1st person is "He" (ie, God), 2nd person is "you" (ie, others), and 3rd person is "I" (self is last). In other words, first is Christ-esteem (Gal 2:20), then other-esteem (Phil 2:3), and last of all self-esteem (Matt 16:24).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme example of humility and selflessness. Christ is God Himself. He is in very essence God. He was God, He is God, and He will forever be God. Although the preincarnate Christ possessed equality with His Father in terms of the fulness of His deity, He resolved not to cling to it. In an act of supreme, unconditional love for man, Christ "made himself of no reputation" (ie, "emptied himself"). What did Christ empty Himself of? The answer is found in what He put on after He divested Himself: He (1) "took upon him the form of a servant," and (2) "was made in the likeness of man" (v7). The word "servant" is the Greek *doulos* which literally means "slave." Christ, though sovereign, was willing to give up His kingly status to take on a most lowly position of a slave. As Creator, He ought to be served by His creatures, but He chose to serve them instead (Mark 10:45). Christ became man by taking on human flesh. He gave up His shekinah glory in order to be clothed with flesh and blood. The second person of the Holy Trinity voluntarily unseated Himself from His divine throne, and disrobed Himself of His divine glory to become a slave and a human being, thereby becoming the

Theanthropos – the God-Man – to save His people from their sins by His work on the cross. The victory Christ achieved through His Cross-work saw Him being exalted to His original position of kingship and glory, and more.

So what did Christ empty Himself of? It must be categorically stated that Christ never, in any way, dispossessed Himself of His divine essence or deity. He remained 100% God when He was on earth. What Christ temporarily gave up was His throne and His glory in order to be 100% Man. Having accomplished the work of redemption, He remains both God and Man forever (Heb 7:24-25), full of glory and grace.

4.3. Salvation (Phil 2:12-18)

Verse 12 which says, “work out your salvation,” has often been misunderstood and misapplied by those who teach that salvation requires good works. The view that works are necessary for salvation goes against such clear passages as Eph 2:8-9 and Tit 3:5 that teach that salvation is by faith alone. It is not our good works that save, but Christ’s (cf Phil 1:6).

It is also important to note that Paul did not say, “work *for* your salvation,” but work *out* your salvation.” In other words, the Philippians already possessed salvation; they just needed to make sure that they manifested the evidences of salvation. Thus the word “salvation” here does not refer to *justification* (the *root* of salvation) but *sanctification* (the *fruit* of salvation). If a person is truly saved, he will surely bear the marks of salvation. It is God who energises the believer to do His will and obey His commands reverently (v13 cf Gal 5:22-26).

Paul enjoined the Philippians to do all the things that God had assigned them to do, be they easy or difficult, without complaining or arguing (v15). A proper attitude towards God’s work is crucial for effective Christian service. The Christian is called to be the light of God’s truth in a dark and corrupt world (Matt 5:14). This light shines most brightly when the light-bearers live pure and separated lives. When Christians do not walk their talk, the gospel light they are supposed to shine will be dimmed or hindered. So in order to hold forth the word of life effectively, they must of necessity hold fast to it (v16).

Paul found great joy in serving God. Although his imprisonment had been trying, he did not complain against or question God. He was willing to pay the ultimate price – to die for the sake of the gospel. He wished for the Philippians to serve the Lord with the same kind of joy (vv17-18).

5. Sending of Two Ministers (Phil 2:19-30)

5.1 Timothy (Phil 2:19-24)

Paul was very concerned for the spiritual growth of the Philippian church. Since he was incarcerated, and not able to minister to them personally, the best thing to do was to send his co-worker – Timothy – to minister to them in his stead (v19).

Paul had full confidence in Timothy as a pastor. Timothy had the same doctrine and spirit as Paul (v20). The phrase “no man like-minded” is literally “no one of equal soul” (*isopsychon*). Like Paul, Timothy had a genuine concern for the spiritual condition of the Philippian church. Others were available for this mission, but disqualified because of selfish motivation (v21). Such were opportunists; they sought to further their own interests and not Christ’s (cf 1:14-17). Timothy on the other hand had a proven track record (v22). He had visited the Philippians repeatedly and ministered to them faithfully (see v1). The Philippians could see very clearly how well Timothy served together with Paul. For over 10 years, Paul and Timothy had served together in the gospel ministry as a spiritual father-son team. Paul thus knew Timothy very well, and his commendation of him to the church carried great weight indeed. Paul would send Timothy as soon as he received news of the outcome of his legal case (v23). He himself is hopeful that he might see the Philippians soon (v24).

5.2. Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30)

Epaphroditus is mentioned in the NT only in the book of Philippians (2:25, 4:18). He was sent by the Philippian church to present a love gift to Paul (4:18), and to serve him personally in jail (2:15). While serving Paul, Epaphroditus took seriously ill and almost died but God was merciful to deliver him (vv26-27). When Epaphroditus heard that his church knew about his condition, it

distressed him greatly. He did not want his fellow church members to worry about him, or to think that he had somehow shirked his duty. He was thus eager to get word back to them that he was fine and had fulfilled his mission. Paul thus thought it good to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi. Seeing him back and well would definitely bring cheer to the hearts of the brethren back home (v28). Epaphroditus could also give a firsthand report of the affairs in Rome. Paul told the church to welcome him back warmly. He has indeed accomplished his assigned task with distinction. The church ought to accord him with the due recognition he deserved for his willingness to risk his life for the sake of Christ, and for his selfless and faithful service to Paul (vv29-30).

III: Press On in Living a Christlike Life

6. Warning Against False Doctrines (Phil 3:1-21)

6.1. Circumcisional Regeneration (3:1-16)

The Philippian church had enemies (1:28). Paul would spare no effort to warn the Philippians repeatedly against false teachers and their destructive doctrines (v1). Indeed such a task was not at all troublesome, but a most needful safeguarding.

In verse 2, Paul issued a caveat against a people he described as (1) “dogs,” (2) “evil workers,” and (3) “the concision.” The word “dog” (*kuon*) here is used disparagingly in the NT as a reference to street dogs (Matt 7:6, Luke 16:21, 2 Pet 2:22, Rev 22:15) as opposed to house dogs (*kunarion*) (Matt 15:26-27, Mark 7:27-28). Those street dogs were wild, vicious, and dangerous animals. Jesus used this word to describe those who attack God’s truth (Matt 7:6). These opponents of God’s Word were “evil (*kakous*) workers.” The word “*kakos*” has the sense of moral wickedness that bring trouble not only to the perpetrators but to others as well. These evil workers bring confusion and chaos to the church. The word “concision” (*katatomēn*) which literally means “mutilation” identifies who these dogs and evil workers were. There is a play on words here. “Concision” (*katatomē*) is a play on “circumcision” (*peritomē*, in v3). These “mutilators” were “circumcisers” – the Judaizers – who preached “another gospel” by insisting that a Christian must be

circumcised in order to be saved (cf Rom 4:1-12, Gal 1:6-9, 2:1-5). By calling them “mutilators,” Paul was using sarcasm to denounce their detestable doctrine which undermined the gospel of God’s free grace. In Gal 5:12, Paul was even more severe and sarcastic in his remarks when he called on those who desired to circumcise others to castrate themselves!

Who are those truly circumcised? Paul identified them in verse 3 as those who are circumcised in the heart (Rom 2:25-29, Col 2:11 cf Deut 10:16, 30:6, Jer 4:4, Ezek 44:7). They are those who were saved by grace through faith, and not by the works of the flesh. They are those who worship God in the spirit, and not according to man-made traditions or external rituals. They are those who rejoice in Christ for the full redemption He brings by His active obedience (ie, His perfect keeping of the law) and passive (ie, His sacrificial death on the cross) obedience.

Was the pot calling the kettle black? Paul warned against those who preach “another gospel” not because he was jealous of their superior Jewish status (cf 1:15-16). There was no reason for Paul to be jealous of them. His Jewish credentials were impeccable: “(1) Circumcised on the eighth day (*according to the Abrahamic covenant of Gen 17:12*), (2) of the stock of Israel (*not a proselyte*), (3) of the tribe of Benjamin (*the only tribe faithful to the Davidic throne in the time of the divided kingdom*), (4) an Hebrew of the Hebrews (*a true blue Jew without mixed parentage*); as touching the law, a Pharisee (*the most orthodox of all the Jewish sects*); Concerning zeal, persecuting the church (*renowned champion of Judaism as archpersecutor of the church*); touching the righteousness which is in the law (*ie, external conformity to the 613 rabbinical laws*), blameless” (vv5-6). Who could beat such a resume? Paul was in no way behind those Judaizers. He surpassed them in every department. He thus attacked them not because he was envious of them, but because of their heretical preaching.

Paul had every reason to place his confidence on his superior heritage and qualifications. He had at one time considered himself a religious “tycoon;” he had made a whole lot of profit through his spiritual investments in the good works of the law. By the grace of God, he came to realise that all those so-called good works were indeed dead works in the light of the glorious gospel of Christ. All his credentials and achievements he cast away as garbage in order to gain Christ (vv7-8). He finally understood that the righteousness

that saves was not his own but Christ's (v9). He was like the businessman in Jesus' parable of the priceless pearl: "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt 13:45-46).

Paul wanted to know experientially the resurrection power of Christ (v10). The power of Christ's resurrection operates in every believer's life presently. It is the power that enables the believer to "walk in the newness of life" (Rom 6:4). This same power that changes believers spiritually to be more like Christ will one day change them physically when they receive their glorified bodies at the time of the rapture/resurrection. This resurrection power, Christ obtained for His saints through His life sufferings (ie, His active obedience, see Gal 4:4-5), and by His sacrificial death (ie, His passive obedience). Christ lived, died, and lived again to save His people from their sins. Christ is the all-sufficient Saviour. So to obtain the life that is eternal and abundant, a man must both die to self (Rom 6:4-11) and die with Christ (Gal 2:20, Col 2:20). He cannot trust himself nor anyone else, but Christ alone.

Phil 3:10 is explained and exemplified by Paul himself in 2 Tim 2:8-12, "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him."

In verses 11-16, Paul spoke of his constant struggle to glorify Christ in his life. The Christian life is something that must be "worked out" until resurrection happens (cf 2:12). The believer has not yet attained perfection but must always strive towards it (v12). The word "perfect" (*teleioo*) here (and also *teleioi* in v15) does not mean sinless perfection but spiritual maturity. It speaks of the process by which the believer will gradually become spiritually mature and ultimately complete in Christ in both body and soul. In the Christian struggle towards perfection, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are at work. Although Christ has already apprehended believers (divine sovereignty), yet they have a duty to apprehend Him (human responsibility). This is the teaching of the 5th point of Calvinism—the perseverance and

preservation of the saints. The *believer perseveres* in his faith because *God preserves* him right till the end. As Calvin said, “Paul was apprehended by Christ that he might apprehend Christ; that is, that he did nothing save by Christ’s influence and guidance.”

For verses 13-16, here is Calvin’s commentary: “13. *I reckon not myself to have as yet apprehended*. He does not here call in question the certainty of his salvation, as though he were still in suspense, but repeats what he had said before—that he still aimed at making farther progress, because he had not yet attained the end of his calling. He shews this immediately after, by saying that he was intent on this one thing, leaving off everything else. Now, he compares our life to a race-course, the limits of which God has marked out to us for running in. For as it would profit the runner nothing to have left the starting-point, unless he went forward to the goal, so we must also pursue the course of our calling until death, and must not cease until we have obtained what we seek. Farther, as the way is marked out to the runner, that he may not fatigue himself to no purpose by wandering in this direction or in that, so there is also a goal set before us, towards which we ought to direct our course undeviatingly; and God does not permit us to wander about heedlessly. Thirdly, as the runner requires to be free from entanglement, and not stop his course on account of any impediment, but must continue his course, surmounting every obstacle, so we must take heed that we do not apply our mind or heart to anything that may divert the attention, but must, on the contrary, make it our endeavor, that, free from every distraction, we may apply the whole bent of our mind exclusively to God’s calling. These three things Paul comprehends in one similitude. When he says that he *does this one thing*, and forgets all things that are behind, he intimates his assiduity, and excludes everything fitted to distract. When he says that he *presses toward the mark*, he intimates that he is not wandering from the way.

“*Forgetting those things that are behind*. He alludes to runners, who do not turn their eyes aside in any direction, lest they should slacken the speed of their course, and, more especially, do not look behind to see how much ground they have gone over, but hasten forward unremittingly towards the goal. Thus Paul teaches us, that he does not think of what he has been, or of what he has done, but simply presses forward towards the appointed goal, and that, too,

with such ardor, that he runs forward to it, as it were, with outstretched arms. ...

“Should any one remark, by way of objection, that the remembrance of our past; life is of use for stirring us up, both because the favors that have been already conferred upon us give us encouragement to entertain hope, and because we are admonished by our sins to amend our course of life, I answer, that thoughts of this nature do not turn away our view from what is before us to what is behind, but rather help our vision, so that we discern more distinctly the goal. Paul, however, condemns here such looking back, as either destroys or impairs alacrity. Thus, for example, should any one persuade himself that he has made sufficiently great progress, reckoning that he has done enough, he will become indolent, and feel inclined to *deliver up the lamp* to others; or, if any one looks back with a feeling of regret for the situation that he has abandoned, he cannot apply the whole bent of his mind to what he is engaged in. Such was the nature of the thoughts from which Paul’s mind required to be turned away, if he would in good earnest follow out Christ’s calling. As, however, there has been mention made here of endeavor, aim, course, perseverance, lest any one should imagine that salvation consists in these things, or should even ascribe to human industry what comes from another quarter, with the view of pointing out the cause of all these things, he adds—in *Christ Jesus*.

“15. *As many as are perfect*. Lest any one should understand this as spoken of the generality of mankind, as though he were explaining the simple elements to those that are mere children in Christ, he declares that it is a rule which all that are perfect ought to follow. Now, the rule is this—that we must renounce confidence in all things, that we may glory in Christ’s righteousness alone, and preferring it to everything else, aspire after a participation in his sufferings, which may be the means of conducting us to a blessed resurrection. ...

“*If in anything otherwise*. By the same means he both humbles them, and inspires them with good hope, for he admonishes them not to be elated in their ignorance, and at the same time he bids them be of good courage, when he says that we must wait for the revelation of God. For we know how great an obstacle to truth obstinacy is. This, therefore, is the best preparation for docility—when we do not take pleasure in error. Paul, accordingly, teaches

indirectly, that we must make way for the revelation of God, if we have not yet attained what we seek. Farther, when he teaches that we must advance by degrees, he encourages them not to draw back in the middle of the course. At the same time, he maintains beyond all controversy what he has previously taught, when he teaches that others who differ from him will have a revelation given to them of what they do not as yet know. For it is as though he had said, – ‘The Lord will one day shew you that the very thing which I have stated is a perfect rule of true knowledge and of right living.’ No one could speak in this manner, if he were not fully assured of the reasonableness and accuracy of his doctrine. Let us in the mean time learn also from this passage, that we must bear for a time with ignorance in our weak brethren, and forgive them, if it is not given them immediately to be altogether of one mind with us. Paul felt assured as to his doctrine, and yet he allows those who could not as yet receive it time to make progress, and he does not cease on that account to regard them as brethren, only he cautions them against flattering themselves in their ignorance. ...

“16. *Nevertheless, so far as we have attained.* ... Paul exhorts the Philippians to imitate him, that they may at last reach the same goal, so as to *think the same thing*, and *walk by the same rule*. For where sincere affection exists, such as reigned in Paul, the way is easy to a holy and pious concord, As, therefore, they had not yet learned what true perfection was, in order that they might attain it he wishes them to be imitators of him; that is, to seek God with a *pure conscience*, (2 Timothy 1:3,) to arrogate nothing to themselves, and calmly to subject their understandings to Christ. For in the imitating of Paul all these excellences are included – pure zeal, fear of the Lord, modesty, self-renunciation, docility, love, and desire of concord. He bids them, however, be at one and the same time imitators of him; that is, all with one consent, and with one mind.

“Observe, that the goal of perfection to which he invites the Philippians, by his example, is, that they *think the same thing*, and *walk by the same rule*. He has, however, assigned the first place to the doctrine in which they ought to harmonize, and the rule to which they should conform themselves.”

6.2. Licentious Antinomianism (3:17-21)

There existed another group of false believers in the Philippian church. Although professing to be Christians, they rejected the law of God and indulge in the lusts of the flesh. Paul called them “enemies of the cross of Christ” (v18). They use the cross of Christ as a licence for their carnal activities. They were the ones who said, “Let us continue to sin so that grace may abound” and “let us sin all the more because we are not under the law but under grace” (Rom 6:1, 15). To both statements, Paul responded with a divine injunction, “God forbid!” (Rom 6:2, 15). Christians are freed *from* sin, and not freed *to* sin.

Nominal believers who live licentiously will ultimately see destruction (*apoleia* is the opposite of *soteria*, “salvation”) (v19). There are many who call themselves “Christian,” but do not live as one. Instead of producing “the fruit of the spirit,” they constantly manifest “the works of the flesh” (Gal 5:16-24). Paul said that such people are not serving Christ, but another god: “whose God is their belly” (v19 cf Rom 16:18, 1 Cor 6:13, Jude 11), and Calvin aptly added, “whose religion is their kitchen.” They take pride in their shameful deeds and are obsessed with the carnal pleasures of life.

Paul enjoined the Philippian Christians to live according to the pattern he has set. He wanted them to be “fellow imitators” (*summimetai*) of him and the other Apostles who have set for them an “example” (*tupos*). They were to observe their conduct closely in order to learn how to behave as citizens of heaven (the word “conversation” in v20 is *politeuma*, “citizenship”). If Christians possess a heavenly citizenship, then they should bear a heavenly and not earthly conduct. As the song goes, “This world is not my home; I’m just a passing through” (cf Heb 11:13, 1 Pet 2:11). Christians as heavenly citizens should model their conduct after their heavenly King – the Lord Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ and of the future resurrection should motivate believers to live according to the spirit and not the flesh (vv20-21). Paul here restated what he had already said in verses 8-10. Although the sin nature is still a part of the born again believer, yet he must seek to overcome the powerful lusts of the flesh by yielding to the sanctifying influence of the Spirit (Rom 7:14-8:6). Christians are not perfect in soul and body at this present time. But with the help of the Spirit, they ought to strive towards perfection until the day Christ returns to

give them their glorified bodies. At that time all carnal weaknesses and spiritual failures as experienced in corruptible flesh would be eliminated (see 1 Cor 15:42-58).

IV: Press On in Building Strong Relationships

7. Sermons on Reconciliation and Christian Virtues (Phil 4:1-9)

7.1. Reconciliation (4:1-4)

Paul exhorted the Philippian brethren to stand firm in the Lord (v1). He loved them dearly and desired very much to be with them. The Philippian church brought much joy to his heart because of the many good reports he had received concerning their spiritual progress. The Philippian church was his crown (ie, a symbol of victory). He founded the church and laboured to ground the church in the Faith so that they might stand victorious in the day of Christ.

Standing firm in Christ involves having “the same mind in the Lord” (v2). Paul pleaded with two sisters – Euodias (meaning “prosperous journey”) and Syntyche (meaning “fortunate”) – to be likeminded. These two ladies had assisted Paul in the gospel ministry (v3). Probably, they had been good friends and partners, and extremely effective as a pair in doing God’s work. Evidently, they were now angry at each other for reasons not revealed. It appears that the problem had nothing to do with doctrine. If it were doctrine, Paul would have addressed and corrected it. It probably has to do with attitude. For some personal reason, they were not on speaking terms. Perhaps they disagreed strongly with each other on how certain things ought to be done. So Paul urged them literally “to think the same thing in the Lord” – which was the same injunction previously given in 3:16 (see also Phil 1:27, 28; 2:2-4; 2:14-16; 3:1). It is unhealthy to have a domineering spirit that insists on getting one’s way all the time. There are times when we need to take a step back or cut some slack, and submit to others in the decision making process.

A peacemaker is usually needed to resolve an inter-personal conflict. Paul appointed Syzygus (meaning “yoke fellow”) to be peacemaker, to lend a hand in bringing Euodias and Syntyche back together (v3). Syzygus was also a fellow worker who shared

the burden of ministry with Paul. Paul must have had confidence of Syzygus' diplomatic ability to restore the friendship those two sisters had previously. Their reconciliation would definitely enhance the gospel ministry. Paul mentioned others like Clement who served together with Euodias and Syntyche. Perhaps they were part of an evangelistic band that had since broken up because of the rift between those two sisters. Paul was convinced that all of them were true believers for their names, he said, were written in the book of life. There was every reason for them to get back together. How good it would be if they could serve together as a happy and united team again (Ps 133:1).

In light of their eternal salvation, Paul exhorted all Christians to be doubly happy in the Lord. "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (v4). Perhaps Paul used the word "rejoice" twice as a direct application to Euodias and Syntyche. A grouchy spirit does not help a sour relationship. But a merry heart can be therapeutic. Prov 17:22 says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Surely if only Euodias and Syntyche can start to smile at each other, their relationship would improve.

7.2. Christian Virtues (4:5-9)

Paul highlighted a few virtues Christians should manifest. The first is moral excellence: "Let your moderation (*epieikes*) be known unto all men" (v5). The Greek "*epieikes*" here has no English equivalent. The KJV chose the word "moderation" or "self restraint." "Moderation" is a good word to speak of *epieikes*, but *epieikes* also contains the idea of leniency, kindness, forbearance, gentleness. In other words, moderation bespeaks a Christian *gentle*-man—a man of chaste conduct and a forgiving spirit. Such a quality must be displayed not only to fellow Christians but also to enemies of the Christian faith. "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Prov 15:1). Fire is not fought with fire, but with water. So fight hatred not with hatred but with love. "Recompense to no man evil for evil. ... Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:17, 21). "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink. For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee" (Prov 25:22). Paul's statement, "The Lord is at hand" (v5b) means Christ is coming back soon. When He comes back He will

punish the wicked, and reward the righteous. In light of Christ's soon return, believers should find the strength to endure all the hardships presented to them by a sin-cursed world.

The second is prayerfulness (v6). Christians ought not to be anxious. They should trust God to provide for all their needs. Prayer is a means of grace. God hears and answers prayers. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). James said, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jas 4:2). Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt 7:7-11).

When petitions are made to God they should be made with a heart of worship and gratitude. The Christian should never approach God with a demanding spirit as if God owes him a living. God owes us nothing; we owe Him everything. God promises His children who seek Him in prayer His peace (v7). God's peace surpasses all human comprehension. It is well nigh impossible to describe or define such divine peace. This peace guards the heart and mind from doubts and worries. It is something most wonderful, and to know it, one must experience it.

Third is righteous thinking (v8). What should fill the mind of a Christian? Only such things as are (1) true (*alethe*, ie, valid, credible, veracious, sincere, upright, honest, just) as opposed to things that are false; (2) noble (*semna*, ie, venerable, reputable, dignified, worthy of respect) as opposed to things abominable or detestable; (3) pure (*hagna*, ie, innocent, pure, blameless, chaste, holy) as opposed to things immoral or defiled; (4) lovely (*prosphele*, ie, dear, beloved, acceptable, pleasing) as opposed to garbage or things disagreeable; (5) of good report (*euphema*, ie, commendable, praiseworthy) as opposed to evil speaking, or slandering. Paul's list here is not exhaustive. To cover every aspect of pure goodness, Paul wrote those two final "if" clauses: "if there be any virtue (*arete*, ie, things that are morally excellent), and if there be any

praise (*epainos*, ie, things that are commendable), think on these things.”

Was there a live example of a godly Christian life that the Philippian Christians could observe and follow? The answer is yes; they had the Apostle Paul. Paul told them to practise what they had learned from him through his (1) letters (“received”), (2) sermons (“hear”), and (3) actions (“seen”). Paul was able to set himself up as an example because he was walking in the steps of Christ: for instance, he told the Corinthians, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Paul had this confidence because he had an infallible ministry as an Apostle of Christ. The Apostles were infallible in their writing (Eph 2:20, 2 Pet 1:20-21), preaching (1 Thess 2:13), and conduct (1 Cor 11:1). Those who abide by the Apostolic teaching are promised God’s peace (cf v7).

8. Attitudes in Giving and Receiving (Phil 4:10-20)

8.1. Receiving (4:10-14)

The Philippians had been faithful financial supporters of the Apostle Paul. When they heard he was in prison, they were immediately moved to aid him in a tangible way, but the opportunity somehow did not present itself. Perhaps, no suitable courier cum helper was available until Epaphroditus presented himself. Finally the gift arrived, and Paul was extremely grateful for their act of kindness (v10).

Paul clarified that though he had a need, it was not the physical relief or financial gift that mattered to him, for he had learned the virtue of contentment (v11). Indeed, in another epistle, he told Timothy, “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6). Paul was not the sort to complain when he had need, nor did he hanker for supplies. He lived quietly, trusting in God His Provider. Thus, he knew how to live contentedly whether rich or poor. It did not bother him whether he had three square meals a day, or not at all (v12). Paul found his sufficiency in Christ. Christ has always provided him with the physical and spiritual strength he needed (v13).

Again, Paul expressed his heartfelt thanks to the Philippians. His spirit of contentment in Christ should not be taken to mean

that he considered their gift unnecessary. Surely, they did well to provide for him, and he was grateful. More importantly, their gift manifested how much they desired to be fellow-sharers with (*sugkoinonesantes*) Paul in his suffering (v14).

8.2. Giving (Phil 4:15-20)

The Philippians had been very generous toward the Apostle Paul. Paul testified how they were the only ones who financially supported his ministry when he left Macedonia (v15 cf Acts 16). The Philippian church ought to be commended because they started giving to Paul when they were still a fledgling church. Paul remembered their gifts to him on at least two occasions when he was in Thessalonica, shortly after he left Philippi (v16 cf Acts 17:1). Ten years have since passed, and they were still keeping up with their giving.

In talking about gifts, Paul had to clarify that his concern was not on how much they had given to him, but how well they had exercised their gift of giving. Paul told them that their faithful giving would see interest accrue to their bank account in heaven (v17). Paul desired to see them prosper in terms of the heavenly rewards Christ will bestow upon them when He returns (1 Cor 2:10-14, 2 Cor 5:10).

There are Christian workers who act poor and deprived in the hope of getting more gifts from their supporters. Not Paul. He showed his integrity by honestly telling the Philippians that they had given him more than enough (v18). What they had done for him was a fragrant offering unto God (cf Eph 5:2). He assured them that such giving pleased God greatly especially when it comes from loving and obedient hearts (2 Cor 9:7).

When Christians make sacrifices to God, do they lose out? Absolutely not! Verse 19 contains one of the greatest Scripture promises that God is the Christian's best Provider. He is not any god, but Paul's God, the God of the Bible, the God of Christians, the living and true God. This God knows how to take care of His people, especially those who wholeheartedly give of themselves and their possessions to extend His kingdom and do His will. Note that God's promise of supply is comprehensive. He shall supply "all your need." He who is all powerful, who owns the cattle upon a thousand hills is able to meet all our needs, both physical and

spiritual (Prov 19:17, Matt 5:7). God is so willing to dispense to His people such glorious riches because of Christ who gives to them not only abundant life now (John 10:10), but also eternal life hereafter (John 14:2-3). Is not God to be praised forever for all the wonderful things He has done for His children (v20)? Indeed He is *Jehovah Jireh. Soli Deo Gloria!*

9. Closing Salutation (Phil 4:21-23)

Paul sent greetings to all the Christians in Philippi. Not only him, but all the following were mindful to send their felicitations as well: (1) his co-workers, viz, Timothy (1:1, 2:19), and Epaphroditus (2:25), including those fellow evangelists of 1:14 (v22); (2) the church in Rome; and (3) the saints in Caesar's household, viz, the imperial guards converted through his ministry, and all others who came under his ministry and theirs (1:12-13) (v23).

Paul ended with a benediction. He blessed them with God's favour that can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ (v23).

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Discussion Questions

(The following are suggested questions to stimulate reflection and discussion. Do feel free to modify the questions if necessary or come up with new ones if led to do so.)

Tuesday, June 5: *Pressing On in Preaching the Gospel*

1. If the Singapore government passes a law to ban evangelism, how would you as a Singaporean and a Christian respond? Does Romans 13:1 apply in such a situation?
2. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Are you able to live by this Pauline motto? Are you prepared to die or be called home? Share your thoughts and feelings?
3. Calvary is known for establishing churches in global cities of first world countries. Is this not "easy" missions? How about the third world? Also, is it necessary to have a pastor before a church is built?

Wednesday, June 6: *Pressing On in Defending the Faith*

1. The B-P church is well known as a separatist church. Do you feel uncomfortable to identify yourself as a B-P? Are there areas where you think we have gone to an extreme in our practice of separation? What can we do to make our separatist witness more effective?
2. Has the separatist spirit and stand caused the B-P church to become cold and unloving? This seems to be the general sentiment of newcomers to our church. Is such an impression true or valid? What can we do about it?
3. Personally, does your belief in separation cause you to view others with suspicion? If someone introduces himself as a Roman Catholic or charismatic, how would you react? Can we be firm and yet inoffensive? If yes, how?

Thursday, June 7: *Pressing On in Living a Christlike Life*

1. How long have you been a Christian? Do you see yourself growing in spiritual maturity? Share how your life has changed since you came to know Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

2. Are there “imperfections” in your life? What are the things you have yet to apprehend? What practical steps will you take to ensure that you are pressing on in your Christian faith?
3. Paul enjoined the Philippians to be imitators of him. How could Paul say this when he was still a sinful person? Do you know of anyone today who could qualify as an example for other Christians to follow?

Friday, June 8: *Pressing On in Building Strong Relationships*

1. Are there fellow believers you simply do not like? Why? Is it OK to let such feelings remain or should we force ourselves to like such people?
2. Have you spent enough time in Bible study, prayer, fellowship, etc? Living in fast-paced, stress-filled Singapore, we just do not have the time to participate actively in church! Is this true? How can we make a living and yet find time for church and family?
3. What have you learned from the Lord in this camp? Share your experiences.