

REVIEW

1. We began our study of the book of **Philippians** with a few facts.
 - a. We included a brief history of the origins of the city of Philippi.
 - b. We identified the author of **Philippians** as Paul (*a.k.a.* Saul) of Tarsus.
 - c. We noted the fact that of Paul’s special relationship with the church at Philippi, which had been established during his second missionary journey.
 - d. We considered the scholarly evidence which indicates that **Philippians** was one of Paul’s “prison letters”, was probably written during his long period of house arrest in Rome and, if that is true, very near to the end of his life.
2. As we move into our systematic study of **Philippians** itself, I want to remind you that, even though it has long been regarded as one of the 27 “books” of the New Testament (as gathered in the Protestant canon), it is NOT a book. It was written as a letter, probably one of several he wrote to that church. I think it is important that we remember this. What we refer to as the “Book” of **Philippians** is actually an ancient written personal communication addressed by a man to a group of people he had met some years before, remembered fondly, and sorely missed. As Fred Craddock has written:

“By its very nature a letter both witnesses to the distance between a writer and a reader and, with few exceptions, seeks to bridge that distance. All of us know this, but may forget it when we approach Holy Scripture. The fact is, Paul was absent from the Philippians and he wanted to be present, but he was in prison. He hoped to see them soon and he knew his presence would be fruitful. However, he saw in his absence also a kind of fruitfulness. Between certainty and uncertainty about their reunion, Paul makes much of his presence and little; he makes little of his absence and much.

“The letter to the Philippians was not, of course, written to us; it was written to another church in another place in another time. However, this letter is a part of the church’s Scripture, and to designate a document as ‘Scripture’ is to say that it has a word for us now.”

- Fred B. Craddock: *Philippians* (The Interpretation Commentary series)

3. Still, you may be wondering, “Why should a local congregation in Rohrsersville, Maryland, USA, in the year of our Lord 2010, be concerned with a letter written from a Roman prison to a small church in a town (which no longer exists, by the way) in ancient Macedonia 1,950 years ago?” A fair question, and one for which there are at least two answers.
 - a. The first answer: Is this not the Word of the Lord and worthy, then, of our scrutiny and consideration?

For the word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12 KJV

- b. The second answer is supplied by theologian J.A. Motyer in the introductory paragraph to his commentary on ***Philippians***:

“Philippians is a joyful letter, but its undercurrent is a sober realization that time is running out. Paul himself was facing a possible death sentence; the church was tensed up, ready for the assault of a menacing world and for the insidious encroachment of false doctrine. Above all, God’s clock was turning relentlessly to the hour which would be both End and Climax.

“If these things were so when Paul wrote, not only has the passage of the years brought The end measurably closer, but the distinctive facts and pressures of the present century bring home the message of Philippians in a very pointed way. The brevity of human life, the sad spectacle of a church in massive retreat before the world and crumbling in its denominational castles – these things combine to prompt questions in us. What objectives should control the rest of my life? What is the real nature of the church? What is the faith of the church and how can we maintain it steadfastly and untarnished in a day of threat and doctrinal confusion? And what does our Lord promise to us? What will we find Him to be in the hour of need? How can we enjoy His benefits, and will we find them sufficient? This most gracious and unassuming of Paul’s letters is a tract for our times.”

- J.A. Motyer: *The Message of Philippians*

LESSON: *Philippians* 1:1-11

1. The first eleven verses of ***Philippians*** can be divided into three sections:
 - a. a greeting (v.1-2),
 - b. a prayer of thanks (v.3-8), and
 - c. a prayer of intercession (v.9-11).
2. The structure of Paul’s greeting is consistent with personal letters of the time and place in which it was written.

- a. This is the rare occasion on which Paul does not feel compelled to identify himself as an *apostle* in order that he may claim the right to teach and demand the attention of his readers; an indication, perhaps, of the personal nature of this letter.
- b. But the author is immediately identified. His inclusion of Timothy in his word of greeting does not mean that the letter was co-written by his young companion, only that he was known to the Christians at Philippi and that he was with Paul in Rome at the time.
- c. Paul's description of himself and Timothy as "*servants* (Greek "doulos") of *Jesus Christ*" plainly conveys his understanding of the Christian faith. Having placed their lives under the authority of God the Son, their lives were thereby dedicated exclusively to Christ's lordship. ***The life-long posture of humility before God and submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ make up the essential essence of the normal Christian life.*** Paul's reference to it here echoes his earlier teaching to the church at Rome.

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey –whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves of righteousness.

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness, leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:16-23 NIV

Paul never separated his confession of faith and profession of faith from the life he lived according to his faith. The *authentic* Christian life consists of more – far more – than something you once said in front of the church or anything you keep saying about your Christian faith. The lived-out practice of your faith will always trump the outspoken profession of your faith. As the apostle James, the brother of our Lord, wrote:

....faith by itself, if is not accompanied by action, is dead. A person is justified by what he does, and not by faith alone.

James 2:17, 24 NIV

3. The typical personal letter of Paul's day would begin with the word "Greetings!" (Greek "chairein"). Paul had sometime before begun using a play on words to expand and qualify the standard salutation in order to make it an expression of the gospel: **Grace** (Greek "charis") **and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. In Paul's hands the common greeting becomes a warm expression of blessing from an explicitly Christian perspective:
 - a. "In this fallen world, where trouble is your constant companion and where death lurks around every corner, may the grace of God provide you with all you need the live the by-faith Christian life to His glory and to your own joy."
 - b. "And may personal peace – that great sense of wholeness and well-being which comes only from your being *in* Christ – calm your nerves, settle your mind, and enable you to live productively every day and to sleep soundly every night."
4. His letter is addressed to the "*saints* (literally, "the holy") *in Christ Jesus*" at Philippi.
 - a. Unless I'm mistaken, this is the only epistle to a local church in which Paul expressly includes that church's leadership structure (*the bishops and deacons*) in his regards.
 - b. The Greek word translated as "saints" conveyed the old covenant understanding that the people of God are "called out", "separate", and "consecrated for His purposes".
 - c. It is an awesome thing that this title is now conveyed to **all** who have come to God by means of faith in Jesus Christ. – even the once-despised Gentiles! But the Christian's status as "holy" is not to be worn as some kind of merit badge. A sinner saved by grace has done nothing to "earn" such a lofty honour. We are "saints **in** Christ Jesus" – His attachment to us is what marks us as "consecrated to God's purposes". Nor does any record of "good" behaviour on the part of the Christian saint perpetuate this status, even though the believer's by-faith relationship with God through Jesus Christ **will** produce specific ethical outcomes. It is important that we get this right. Paul arranged *grace*, *faith*, and *goodness* in their proper order in his letter to the church at Ephesus.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.
For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV

5. Paul wants the church at Philippi to know not only **that**, but also **how**, he prays for them.
- a. First of all, he is **thankful** for them, so thankful that he utters a prayer of thanks to God every time he remembers them, a prayer which is always prayed **with joy**.
 - b. And why is Paul so thankful for the Philippian Christians?
 - (1) their consistent *partnership in the gospel* (v.5) and
 - (2) his awareness of the perseverance of their Christian faith, which he readily attributes NOT to them, but to Christ Himself (v.6).

NOTE: There is an on-going debate among evangelical Christians concerning the correct understanding of Paul's expressed conviction in v.6, to the point that two different terms have become part of the Christian lexicon to describe the two different understandings of the same essential doctrine, "Eternal Security" and "Perseverance of the Saints".

- (3) He is thankful to "have them in his heart" and rests assured that they are his faithful, reliable partners in the grace of God (v.7). This is yet another powerful expression of the essential unity of the church.
5. Verse 9 takes us to the heart of this particular sermon: "How to Pray for the Church". Having shared with his friends at Philippi his prayers of thanksgiving, he now explains how he intercedes on their behalf.
- a. He prays that their love will abound *more and more*.
 - b. He prays that their knowledge will abound *more and more*.
 - c. He prays that their *depth of insight* will deepen further.
 - d. Finally, he prays for what might be accomplished by means of this process of Christian growth in the church:
 - (1) DISCERNMENT regarding what is PURE
 - (2) evidence of the FRUITS of RIGHTEOUSNESS * (See **Galatians 5:16-26**.)
 - They come THROUGH Jesus Christ.
 - They come FOR the glory of God. *Amen*.