

# **THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**

**THE REV. DR. R. EDGAR BONNIWELL**

Sermons

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# THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(1)

## So Many Choices, So Little Time (Exploring the Treasured Verses of Philippians)

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

1/29/24

Philippians 4:4; 4:21-43

Tonight, we are beginning a study of what has been called the *Epistle of Joy*, and after our long trek, of studying all of the Kings of the Davidic line, we are long overdue for some real joy. Joy is a big word in the Book of Philippians. The key text is found in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say rejoice.”

Some saints do more frowning than they do smiling, and I’ve had more than one saint ask me what I mean when I speak of “laughing the laughter of the redeemed.” I think the thrust of the entire New Testament calls us to be happy-hearted, not heavy-hearted believers. I don’t have a Pollyanna attitude about life, but oh beloved, when we “walk with the Lord in the light of His Word”, what a joy He sheds on our way. We are “accepted in the beloved”, and called God’s own dear children. Right now, Jesus Christ is pleading our cause. He is our able advocate. All of the promises in the Bible that God has made for us, are all “yes and amen” in Jesus Christ. What a basis for joy.

Personally speaking, this book powerfully affected the course of my life. As I anticipated Seminary, I was led of the Spirit, and even encouraged by a few, to go to Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton University. Many friends, and even a few college professors, greatly discouraged me. “It will ruin you” they said, and it precipitated real confliction in my soul. While I sought many counselors, there was no unanimity among those that I consulted.

Finally, one night I sat alone with my Bible in hand, and my eyes fell on Philippians 4:22, wherein Paul, writing from Rome, said to the Philippians, “All the saints here greet you, especially those who are in Caesar’s household?” Suddenly Heaven opened. Paul was saying that right in Caesar’s house, God had His people fluffing Caesar’s pillow and making his bed; and if God had His people there, he certainly had them at Princeton. The matter was settled within milliseconds.

Sure enough, God had many wonderful men of God at Princeton Theological Seminary. To this very hour I revel and delight in the numerous years I spent on that campus, learning the Bible, how to preach, and how to think theologically. Beloved, the Lord uses His Word to speak to us. This Bible is trustworthy; it’s forever settled in Heaven. As we go through the Book of Philippians, anticipate God quickening certain verses to your heart. For our wonderful Savior loves ... “to lead His dear children along!”

What a great book this is. Therefore tonight, we’re going to spend our time getting acquainted with this book. And then next week, we will begin the verse-by-verse exposition.

First, I want to begin with a few cursory comments about this particular Book. It is called one of the prison epistles because Paul wrote this little tome while he was in a prison cell in Rome. Tangentially speaking, he also wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon while he was in prison. Those books were written at different times, but the best Bible scholars believe that the Book of Philippians was written between AD 60 to 62.

Paul spent a 2-year period under house arrest in Rome, with soldiers guarding him, but he was permitted to have visitors, and he had many opportunities to share the gospel, as we read in Acts 28:16, 31; also know that Philippi was the first church established in Europe. He was deeply involved in the founding of that ministry, and he had great affection for the believers there who had most recently sent a gift to him. Paul wanted to encourage them in their ongoing lifestyle of unity and holiness and joy. In the book of Philippians, we find Paul doing more than just turning a felicitous phrase, but really laying out some profound doctrinal truths.

Let's just get acquainted with some of these things. First of all, in terms of Bible verses that are real treasures, we have one in Philippians 1:6, where he says ... "He who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ." What a tell-all verse, the work God starts in us will be brought to completion, and that means that right now you're still under construction. He also speaks of his chains, his imprisonment; and because of the way he handled it, it helped others to take heart, and to be bold in their testimony also. He speaks of brethren who had become "confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear", chapter 1:13-14. How about 1:21, "for me to live is Christ, to die is gain." Look at chapter 1:29, "For to you has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Now there's a thought that has been lost from the American evangelical mindset.

Then of course he shares the great Kenosis passage, Kenosis means self-emptying. Philippians 2:7, "but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." Notice the phrase, "He emptied Himself". Let me give you a heads-up, He did not empty Himself of His deity; rather He simply set aside some of His divine prerogatives, but He was always God in the flesh. Jesus called Himself the Messiah, and the Son of God, and the Son of man. There are those that teach that He emptied Himself of His deity then went about doing good, but then on the cross just as He died, He took back His deity. Nothing in scripture would support that line of thinking. And yet this is preached, and when we get to our exposition of this verse, we are going to exhaust the meanings thereof, and it's my hope to turn you into a great apologist, for the truthfulness of this passage.

Also, we got another great text in Philippians 2:12, Paul says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. What does he mean? – We're going to find out. In Philippians chapter 3, Paul gives us a kind of autobiography – a reflection on how he saw himself before Christ, as a man with confidence in the flesh ... Philippians 3:5-7 (NKJV)

<sup>5</sup> "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

<sup>7</sup> But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

Also, another great verse so revealing of Paul's heart in Philippians 3:10, and many of us make it our own daily prayer ... "oh, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection."

Remembering that Jesus Christ is the Wonderful Counselor, we find some great clinical advice in Philippians 3:13 ... "I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead." It is unbelievable how many people get fastened to their own morbid past; and then they can't get past their past. God in this passage gives us permission to forget it. Remember Jesus has said that Christ "forgives our sins and remembers them no more".

In counseling, how often I've said to people when they fall into that circular thinking, 'Yes Pastor, but you see, way back here this happened, then that happened', and that's when I tell them that God can't remember it, it's all been dumped in the great sea of His forgiveness. If we can't forgive ourselves when Jesus Christ has forgiven us, we are making the cross of Christ of none effect. Beloved, for freedom Christ has set us free. We have forgiveness through the blood, and self-flagellation about yesterday's sins, though forgiven by Christ, is a complete denial of His finished work. Beloved, it's time to close the books on our past. Who among us doesn't have some messes in our past? Make it a practice beloved, never to remember what God has forgotten. That works for me. – make it work for you.

Also note in Philippians 3:20, he says, "our citizenship is in Heaven." That means we're Kingdom people first and foremost. This world is passing away. Too many of us are constantly thinking, left or right, and we need to think with the mind of Christ, with a Kingdom mind. If I'm a Kingdom citizen I need to behave in a way that flatters the Kingdom; I want to be governed by a Kingdom mentality.

Then in chapter 4 we have the great key verse that gathers up the real thrust of the entire epistle, Paul writes Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice." Paul was in chains in a Roman prison. From our modern mindset and psychotherapy perspective, we'd say ... he's in clinical denial. How easy it is to live under our circumstances and not above them.

You know, I bumped into something last week and I put it on Facebook. This is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which I believe is the most magnificent document ever penned in the history of the English language, which captures the best expression of historic Christian faith. In book 3.1, we read, **"God has unchangeably ordained whatever comes to pass."** That doesn't make God the author of evil, but God has allowed whatever has come to pass for divine purposes.

Paul in chains understood that the circumstances had been permitted by Christ, to use his extremity for the furtherance of the Gospel, i. e. divine purpose. I think Paul was stretching his neck, anticipating all of the good things, things he could rejoice in that were facilitating the Lord's great plan for Paul, ordained for him from the foundation of the world.

I don't like suffering setback and heartache, and loss; and I would never make light of real suffering, but I do agree with the Puritan Divines who wrote that statement in the Westminster Confession, that God has unchangeably ordained whatever comes to pass, for "God makes the wrath of men to praise Him", and brings purpose out of the worst things that life can give us. Didn't Paul say "we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us", or is that some kind of conditional statement, as in, 'once in a while we can be more than conquerors, or from time to time we can prevail.' What I'm talking about here is being in possession of the mind of Christ, wherein we can say, as bad as this is, something in all of this will redound to God's glory, and my own greater good. Many of us need to get our joy back, our smile, our happy heart. In the book of Philippians, God will dry our tears, take us passed our past, and reacquaint us with the true doctrine of Christ.

Here's another great passage that is so good for our emotional and mental health, and which facilitates true spirituality ... Philippians 4:8, "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." What a great text! If I preach a sermon on this one text, then I see 8 points that need to be developed, and that's probably what I'll do.

For many of us the worst enemy of our souls is our own mind. Too often we do the work of the enemy on ourselves. Take authority over your mind – offer it to Christ. Don't allow yourself to be defeated because you allowed yourself to get fixated on the wrong things.

How about Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That's a great promise to claim when we're worn thin. Another wonderful promise, Philippians 4:19 ... "and my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory through Jesus Christ." I can't read that verse without hearing the reverberating voice of Dr. David Seamands who preached the message from that text which he called, *"The God of Unending Supply."*

A little over a week ago I cut the light out, indeed, it was last Sunday night, I looked down at this very nice office chair that I have. For 8 months my previous chair would lose its juice and shrink almost to the floor, landing my chin on the desk, the arms were almost threadbare, and if I leaned the wrong way, it would tip me over, which happened on one occasion. A good office chair is expensive, I remember praying, "Lord I can't afford an office chair, and I don't think the church can buy me one, so I'm going to ask you to supply one." I prayed and nothing happened, off and on through a 3-week period, I would lift it up from time to time, then my wife called and said, "I'm bringing something home to you, we got a call from one of our warehouses and they said come and get what you want". She brought home this beautiful office chair. A little thing, but little or big, God delights to delight in us saints, and "what father would give his son a stone, when he asked for a fish?". We need to trust Him more intentionally with our needs, if you need more clients – ask for it, more parishioners – ask for it, a promotion, more money – ask for it, if you need an open door – ask for it. You cannot exhaust God's riches.

I remember one time I was fretting about an automobile, one night I looked out of my window and two big Mercury Marquis' were coming up the long driveway. Marilyn Coburn was

in one, and Russ Coburn was in the other. I thought that was interesting. So, they came in and we had a great visit while it got dark outside. I remember very vividly it was March and it was cold. They didn't stay long, and then they left. We closed the door, we had a good time together and shared a little desert, and about 20 minutes later, I looked out the window, one car was gone and the other was left. I went out to the car and the keys were left in it. I thought maybe there was car trouble and they're going to send someone to get it. About ½ hour later Russ called me and said, "I want you to enjoy your new car." He said, "Drive it, it's yours; and if you want to sell it, you can." Then he said, "You know Pastor Ed, God always has a car for you." I've never forgotten that, and he was right. We need to take our needs to the Lord and not deny Him the opportunity to provide, even if we're wealthy, or have more than most. I'm sure that many of you could easily go finance an automobile, but God has a way of bringing things to us that we need when we look unto Jesus. Then if it saves us a few dimes, we can further honor the Lord by giving it to Him.

This verse ought to be underlined in your Bibles, Philippians 4:19 ... again look at it "My God will supply all your need according to His riches in glory through Jesus Christ." Of course, the big verse I mentioned, that helped me in my decision to go to Princeton in Philippians 4:22, as Paul revealed that the saints in Rome had believers even in Caesar's household, fluffing the emperor's pillow. He wanted the church at Philippi to remember that they were praying for them. This is a great, great epistle.

The church at Philippi was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey amidst a storm of persecution. Turn to Acts chapter 16. First of all, it's quite interesting how the Lord specifically led Paul and Silas to Philippi, and remember, it wasn't Paul and Barnabas because they had had that falling out over John Mark. So Paul took Silas and went one way, and Barnabas took John Mark and went the other way. Remember that it was the Holy Spirit who said in Acts 13, "Separate Paul and Barnabas for this work." It was God who put those two men together and then came this falling out. That was unfortunate. We do have failings in our Christian life, don't we? But when it happens, we shouldn't throw in the towel. Our failings should grieve us, but we should never legitimize them.

Look at Acts 16:6, Paul and Silas were going through the region of Galatia, but they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in that area. Then they came to Mysia (vs. 7) and they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. (vs. 8) So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas." Listen to vs. 9, "and a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with Paul, saying ... "Come over to Macedonia and help us." In vs. 10ff, we're told that immediately Paul and Silas sought to go into Macedonia, rightly concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel. So they sailed from Troas to Samothrace, and then on to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which was the foremost city in Macedonia.

(Vs. 13) "And on the Sabbath day, they went out of the city to a riverside, a place where prayer was customarily made", Paul and Barnabas sat down and spoke to the women who were meeting there. Look at Acts 16:14, "Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us". She was a business woman saints, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple. She worshipped the God of

Israel. Now the next part of vs. 14 has always given me goosebumps, and dear ones every converted saved person can say this. Look at what it says, Acts 16:14b, “and the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul”. She believed, and she and her household got baptized, and she said, “Come to my house and stay with us”.

Then Paul tangled with a slave girl that was menacing him and his ministry; he spoke to the demon within and she was set free. But she was being used by merchants for profit, so Saul was seized and Silas also handed over to the authorities, and charges were made. (Vs 22) “Then the multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.” (Vs. 23) They were thrown into prison, into the inner prison, (vs. 24) “and they fastened their feet in the stocks”.

I love Acts 16:25, “but at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening.” What a place to hold a worship service. You know beloved, you can worship God anywhere, and in any circumstance. When my first wife died and the demons would come, and the loss threatened to re-shred my soul, I learned to worship my way past those horrible moments. Do you know we become like what we worship, and if we are worshipping the true God there’s a great impartation of the presence of the true God.

The story is somewhat familiar, a great earthquake appeared and all the prison doors opened, and the jailer, supposing that all the prisoners fled was about to fall on his sword, the penalty would have been death anyway, but Paul called out to him, “Do yourself no harm, we’re all here”. Taking a torch, he ran to where Paul and Silas were and fell down before them trembling; he had heard the psalming and the singing, (vs. 30) “And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”

There’s a lot of people that need to raise that question, and it’s getting late. Jeremiah said, “summer is ended and harvest is past, and we are not yet saved.” You have friends and I have friends, and I have a lot of SAR friends, and the clock is ticking three score and 10, and by reason of their strength maybe a few more years; it’s time to prepare for finals, and they can’t think of it. Life isn’t forever. We need to be saved. There’s an eternity in front of us, and there’s a Heaven to be gained and a Hell to be missed, and we need to be saved from God, from His wrath.

This is really the great question, isn’t it? What a beautiful answer is given ... “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ... “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” How hard is that? No religious hoops to jump through. No laws to keep, no promises to make, we do not have to go and do religious things, we just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

They spoke the Word to this jailer, (vs. 32) and the jailer washed their stripes, and their wounds, and then he and his entire family were all baptized; because they had believed. The jailer fed them, and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all of his household.

The next morning the magistrates sent officers to inform Paul and Silas that they were to be freed. So they were told to depart and go in peace, but Paul said, “You beat us openly, un-condemned Romans, and you threw us into jail, you made a spectacle of us, and now you’re



going to put us out secretly”. When the officers told these words to the magistrates ... look at vs. 38, “they were afraid, when they heard that they were Romans, and so they came and pleaded and made apology, and asked them to depart the city.” So they went back to Lydia’s house, met with the brethren, and then they departed. This gave birth to the church at Philippi.

When we were about to start this ministry, HillSide Bible Church, a person asked me, “Do you really think, Reverend, that we need another church?” This is a fascinating statistic. Prior to Covid we had about 450,000 churches in America. We’re down now to only about 300,000 of all kinds. Which would include mainline, independent churches, churches in steeple houses, house churches, churches without walls, like ours, and if we were to experience a great national move of God, something on the scale of the first or second great awakenings, or the Jesus movement, we would need 300,000 churches to accommodate it. We have over 300 million people in America and if only 10% got saved we would need 300,000 churches at a minimum. I say let God arise and do this great work. The church at Philippi became a great church. Its history is very interesting, and we’ll look at that next time.

Close your Bibles. Do you do more frowning than smiling as a believer? Would your friend’s say you’re happy-hearted. Some believers appear as though they are owning the burdens of the world. The Christian life is about trusting life implicitly. That is trusting Him with everything; your difficult mother, the hostile workplace where you seem to be beat up every day, and the anguish of experiencing ‘too much month at the end of the money’. These things mitigate against real joy. Why not get on your knees and pray this prayer;

“Father, beginning today I’m placing all of these things in your hand. I believe you’re sufficient for all things. Therefore Lord, I’m casting my burden upon you. Bring your joy to my life, born of a confident trust; and may my life reflect it!”

If you pray that prayer authentically, praying from the heart, the Lord will hear and answer it; and you will begin to walk in a new freedom, with more joy than you could ever imagine!

You think about that! Amen.

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## **THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**

(2)

### **A Praying Heart is a Joyful Heart**

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

2/5/24

Philippians 1:1-11

Last time we got acquainted with this wonderful Epistle of Joy, the Book of Philippians; we noted a number of very encouraging passages, and some of those texts that relate to very big theological ideas – now we are going to begin our exposition.

As we jump into chapter 1, and again remember that Christian joy is a big theme here, nevertheless the name Jesus Christ occurs 17 times in this first chapter alone. Paul, of course, speaks of joy here many times, but it’s overshadowed by the name of Jesus. What I’m saying is that this first chapter is very Christo-centric, and that’s understandable, because Paul longed to know Jesus deeply ... “Oh that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection.” Notice that this letter coming to the Philippians was sent to them by Paul and Timothy, and there are those who speak of the dual authorship of the book of Philippians, but tradition puts the focus on Paul. Paul was the senior and more seasoned Apostle, and the language itself seems to be consistent with Pauline thought. So almost from the git-go church historians have ascribed the authorship entirely to Paul.

He wrote this epistle while he was a prisoner in Rome, and Paul’s tenure in prison is recorded for us in Acts chapter 28. There in Acts 28:16 we read, “Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.” Then note additional verses about his circumstances like vs. 30, then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house and received all who came to him; preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching the things which concerned the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

It was at that time that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi and the first thing that we see here is that Paul had tremendous affection for the saints there. He says 3 big things. In vs. 3-6 he says, “I have you in my mind”; in vs. 7-8, “I have you in my heart”; and vs. 9-11 Paul says, “I have you in my prayers”.

Paul may have been a mighty Apostle, but as I have looked at Paul’s life and writing for well over 55 years, I see a man with a shepherd’s heart. Over the course of my ministry, I have known many men who like the ancient Chrysostom were golden mouthed orators. They could hold an audience spellbound, but they were not shepherds. Indeed, they had very little to do with the people that they were called to care for. Paul had a great heart for the saints of God. Love, agape love, magnetizes people to God. Whatever Paul’s downside, i. e. headstrong, determined, bold and blunt, usually that found expression when he engaged the world and those hostile to the faith, but he was tender, towards believers.

Notice that he addresses the Philippians by saying, (vs. 1b) “To all the saints in Christ Jesus”. The word ‘saints’ means believers, and particularly underline the little phrase, ‘in Christ’. In Romans 8 this little phrase in Christ is used 8 times, that’s who Christians are. Namely, people who are in Christ, and for whom Christ is in them. “... Christ in you the hope of glory.” Let me point something else out here. In terms of context, there Paul is addressing the believers at Philippi. Note the phrase “To all the saints in Philippi”, but in a broader sense what is written here is to every Christian. The Bible tells us that the inspired Word was written for all believers in every age that we might have confidence in God. These things were written as an example. In terms of interpreting the Bible, we should always ask the question, what does the passage mean in its context. Then we should also ask, what does it mean for us. Until we have taken the second step, we have not completed proper exposition.

Notice that he addresses bishops, deacons, and the entire church. I have never done a comprehensive study on ecclesiology which gathers up how the church is to be governed; and there is a lot of disagreement, almost every denomination claims that their form of church government is the Biblical form. However, certain terms are used interchangeably. The word Pastor, *poimen*, in Greek, means caretaker. *Episcopos*, an overseer, watcher or guardian; for the Jews it means a ruler. A deacon is a table waiter. The word ‘elder’ means one who teaches and rules. The word ‘bishop’ simply means a Pastor, or a chief overseer. Church government uses these terms to suit their structure.

The greater point here however, is that Paul was aware of this church, how it was governed, led – and that he was thoroughly acquainted with the total ministry and all the people there. What flows from his pen in the following verses is not one word of correction, but affirmation and deep love. Notice what he covets for them, namely grace and peace ... a believer who is gracious and peaceful has a great witness. The Bible says we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. To live this life knowing that God doesn’t have a quarrel with us, is a precious thing. Peace with ourselves and peace with others only becomes our present possession when we have peace with God.

Come now to vs. 3, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you”, from the time Paul founded the church at Philippi in acts 16, until the writing of this epistle, 11 years had passed. But Paul’s affection for the believers there was reigning supremely in his heart. His love for them had not diminished, nor theirs for him, and we can say that based on their generous support of Paul which is addressed in Philippians 1:4-20. The Philippian church had brought Paul much joy and little pain. Some of the churches Paul founded in later years developed severe problems and became a great burden on Paul’s heart; the churches in Rome and Galatia were threatened by the Judaizers and wanted to stick everyone back under the law. Think of the church in Corinth, plagued by everything from incest to one-up-man-ship, and abuse of spiritual gifts. Then of course, the church at Ephesus was plagued by false teachers, and the church at Colosse was turning away to embrace various heresies. The church at Thessalonica fell to false doctrine that Christ had already come, and disrespect for leaders had taken hold of the body life. Church work isn’t easy, but the church at Philippi had a particular place in Paul’s heart; and every time he

thought of them ... his every remembrance of them ... elevated and ennobled his own heart and life.

There are people like that. I want to be that kind of person. I bet you do too. When was the last time you gave thanks to God for that person the Lord brought into your life in the yesteryears of your Christian sojourn. It really was providential, wasn't it? What they modeled for you, how they mentored you, the beauty of Christ that you saw in them. Indeed, their life and how they lived called you to higher ground. When you think about them, you give thanks to God, because you know it was God's providential hand that caused them to intersect with your life.

Just as the Bible says, God delights to delight in us, we should all want to be people with whom others would find delight. Paul knew this congregation, and he probably visited Philippi on three separate occasions. On his second missionary journey, wherein, he initially planted the gospel. (Acts 16:12) And then he probably visited Philippi on his second journey from Ephesus on his journey to Greece, where he stayed for 3 months. Then probably, he was at Philippi on his way back to Jerusalem recorded for us in Acts 20:6. We don't know the length of time for each stay, but he certainly had cemented a strong relationship with the believers there. ... "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you."

By the way, vs. 3-6 in the Greek language is just one sentence. The big idea is one of gratitude. Thus, we find Paul giving thanks every time the Philippians came to his mind. Because of his affection for the Philippians, they are constantly in his prayers ... vs. 4, "Always in every prayer of mine, making requests for you all with joy." Paul faithfully interceded for the Philippians, beating down the door of Heaven, wanting God's best and finest for them.

"Prayer", as someone has said, "is not overcoming God's reluctance, but rather connecting with His highest willingness." For Paul, prayer was never a dull duty, but an incomparable joy. Sadly, prayer is a big struggle for many people. In my last church we could get nearly 50 people out for midweek services, we began referring to Wednesday nights as The Beehive – a big church dinner every Wednesday night. The pantry was open, dozens and dozens of people would come, the youth had their big program, the choir would rehearse briefly, and our 7-8 o'clock service - oh it was a high time. But I got convicted and felt that we should occasionally set aside times, maybe 6 times a year to come together to pray; what happened was devastating to me. My attendance could go from 50 to 10, and the protests were many ... 'This isn't my thing, Pastor; I would not know how to pray for an hour ... that would be too much for me. ... that doesn't appeal to me' ... ad infinitum, ad nauseum. I went to work diapering and burping, "Now, now, it's not like you think, try it... it's a wonderful thing to tarry in the Lord's presence. In the Garden did not Jesus say ... 'Could you not tarry one hour.'" All of that kindness, encouragement and wooing hardly changed a thing.

I am clueless as to how to get people excited about praying. But I'll tell you the dots I have connected; a sound prayer life comes out of a solid walk with Jesus Christ. Beloved, a 2-minute prayer life every day will not keep the demons away. Another great value of prayer is that it's the best commentary on scripture. I would come home from seminary and find myself psalming with my grandmother, Lula Bonniwell. She had these sublime insights in the scripture.

“Grandmother where did you get that from, what are you reading?” She never stepped foot in a Christian bookstore in her life, never owned a commentary of any kind. She only used a large King James text edition. But she lived in the scriptures and prayed on her knees. Many a time she could come out with things so pithy I think it could have taken Spurgeon’s breath away. Beloved, prayer is how we live close to God. Prayer is the key that unlocks scripture. Through prayer we keep our own hearts from becoming calcified from our own flesh. Prayer opens our eyes to the reality of the Kingdom; it’s how we enter into the exchanged life. Through prayer great Kingdom verities become our present possession. Paul was a man of prayer ... (vs. 4) Again, “always in every prayer of mine, making requests, intercessions for you, and doing it with joy and delight.”

We’re creatures of time and space. We can’t get on our knees and spend hours and hours praying for this one or that one, but we can pray regularly, and faithfully for various people, and sometimes God puts others on our hearts for a season. Don’t you find it comforting when you realize that others are praying for you? Sometimes I get notes, “Pastor Ed, in the recent month I’ve really been praying for you, and I’m trusting God is bringing good things to your life.” Praise God for such people that want God’s best and finest for us.

Paul is so fond of the Philippians because of their fellowship (really, partnership in the gospel) that began to exist right from the git-go until the present hour. What is in view here is much more than warm feelings of friendship. The better rendering here is partnership which suggests a robust commitment that went far beyond emotions as existing between Paul and the Philippians – it was a very reciprocal relationship. Together they shared the passion for souls that was in Paul’s heart and which God had put into theirs. They bought in lock, stock, and barrel, to the Gospel program. Think of the impact on the Philippian Church. Philippi was a Roman colony, and because of their loyalty and fidelity to Rome, over a period of 100 years if not more, they were granted privilege after privilege. In Philippi Caesar was greatly honored, and all were proud of their Roman citizenship. But for the believers there, there was something else that mattered even more. Namely, their citizenship that was in Heaven, and the freedom that they had to share with Paul in his great mission to take the Gospel to the world.

Close your Bibles. When I arrived at Duke University as a young Associate Pastor, about the third day there, the senior minister called me into his office. He said, “Brother Ed, both of us come from differing backgrounds, but we cannot take this church forward unless we are on the same page. I know that you are chomping at the bit to get down to ministry, but first we’ve got to get on the same page, and this church is in serious financial trouble; the first thing we have to do is do vision casting, and raise money to support the ministry we want to have.”

While that is not a verbatim conversation, it’s pretty close. I struggled with that, but I got on board with it. The senior minister and I spent an entire week outlining new approaches to ministry. Most of the people coming to the University Church lived out in suburbia, passing many other churches in order to get to us. Many of the people there were imminently successful; doctors, lawyers, bankers, and scientists. The last thing that we wanted to do was come off looking like we were groping in the dark. The senior minister was a very sophisticated man. Sadly, he was not an evangelical, but I did respect him; he’d been a chaplain in WWII

heavy combat, and he had been a faithful shepherd. Thus, with singularity of purpose, and unwavering in our vision, we asked the leadership, and then the church at large, if we could all partner together to put our church on a solid footing so that we could do redemptive ministry. They did, and do you know what happened? We raised well over a million dollars, and the ministry took off.

Unity of purpose is still important in ministry. Paul and the Philippians were completely unified in their partnership to take the Gospel to the Gentile world. I'm sure the local church had to deal with certain issues, but they would not allow anything to preempt the greater mission. No pettiness or small mindedness was allowed to get traction. Of course, there was demonic opposition, but apparently there was a spiritual maturation that characterized most of the believers; therefore, nothing got sandbagged.

Beloved, selfless saints are the only kind of saints that can ever get anything done for the Kingdom. A dissenting voice that sidelines God's greater purposes, is always a grievous thing. Never let that charge be laid at your feet!

Here ends the lesson. Amen.

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## THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(3)

### Dealing with Uncertainty God’s way

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

2/12/24

#### Scripture

Our exposition of Philippians chapter 1 continues. Thus far we have noted that Paul had deep and abiding affection for the Philippians, in vs. 3-6 he says, “I have you in my mind”; in vs. 7 - 8 he says, “I have you in my heart”; and in vs. 9-11 Paul says, “I have you in my prayers”. The Church at Philippi was precious to Paul. We noted last time that often the churches were a great burden on him, but the Philippian Church shared a wonderful partnership with Paul in taking the Gospel to the world.

It’s true isn’t it; sometimes we can be in a kind of heap and then a certain person calls us and we begin to soar, our hope is renewed, and no matter what you talk about you’re left with a desire to go deep with God. I think this is the way Paul felt about the Philippians. No wonder he said, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” They had a wonderful partnership in the Gospel. For both Paul and the Philippian Church, reaching the Gentile world was what they lived for. They were both on the same page.

As we traffic in this chapter and throughout the Epistle. We need to distinguish between worldly joy and Christian joy; worldly joy requires delightful circumstances, while Christian joy depends on deep seeded delight in Christ, not circumstances. Elizabeth Elliot once spoke to this very thing, she did so eloquently ... “the secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances.” If you’re listening for it, the word joy is behind almost every verse. Paul has joy in praying for the Philippians; he experiences joy when he remembers them ... he has great joy in his partnership with the Philippians, and now in verse 6, even more joy when he remembers ... look at the verse, “that He who has begun a good work in you, will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”, or the day of the Lord, the day when God brings the consummation. Paul is saying here, that when God brought you into saving faith, that’s when His good work started; and that good work in us never stops and starts, and was never set aside, rather it is continuous and ongoing, and unrelenting.

I use the word militant, because when Christ gets a hold of us He is taking us somewhere; and that somewhere is Him taking us to our best selves of being complete in Jesus Christ. God isn’t done with us; God has committed Himself to our everyday and every day he was transforming i.e. completing His work in the Philippians. Every day He is perfecting us, conforming us to the likeness of His Son.

Also note that this good work that God has begun in us is rooted in the divine goodness of the Father, and this good work will be brought to completion. God is a worker who completes His work. I’d like to paraphrase that prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon here, who points out that in the Bible there is not one instance of God beginning any work and leaving it incomplete.

He writes “Show me for once a world abandoned and thrown aside, half formed; show me a universe cast off from the great potter’s wheel, with the design in outline, the clay half-hearted, and the form unshapely from incompleteness.” You can’t! God does His homework, completes His assignment, and gets it in on time!

God is working in you and me my friend. Every day He’s investing in you. In the world as we age, we’re dealt with more dismissively; sometimes considered not all that viable, but in the Kingdom, as we get older it seems as though, God invests Himself in us with much more intensity. Seasoned saints take the Kingdom forward. We have less inner-personal conflict, we have a clearer picture, decades of study and dedication, and God working in us enables us to incarnate His life and serve the Kingdom with greater giftedness. He’s working in us right now, and that means we’re not forgotten, that means we matter, that means we’re not at arms distance from Him, that means He is giving to us exactly what we need. What a glorious and joyous revelation this is. How misguided we are when we say – I wish God would do something in this circumstance. God is always working.

Notice vs. 7, Paul says I have you in my heart. Paul is drawing strength from them because of their walk. Because he sees the Gospel that he preached to them that was shaping their lives, giving them maturity and heart-hunger. They had not forgotten Paul in his chains. (vs. 7) They were not ashamed of His imprisonment. I love the language that is here – it is so affectionate – “How greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ”.

Look back at vs. 7, the NKJV renders it ... “It is right for me to think” (the actual Greek word means to feel; *phronein*). It is used by Paul 23 times in this letter alone. This word means more than simply affection, or some emotional reaction; it goes deeper suggesting a special concern based on the best interest of others. This is sanctified altruism. It is “esteeming others better than one’s self.” This is selfless love that can only be the present possession of someone who is in Christ. Knowing that, we hear Paul saying ... again vs. 8, “How greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ”. We hear the heart of a father for his children. There is something that is so special that exists here between the Philippians and Paul – there is a bond, and for a moment in time, the Church was an extension of the Kingdom of God on earth. Thus, with that kind of passion and selfless commitment for the Philippians, Paul prays that their love would abound, being informed by all knowledge and discernment ... he prays that they would be able to approve things that were excellent, and he also prays that they would be sincere and without offense until the day of Jesus Christ, and that they would be filled with the fruits of righteousness which flow out from the benevolent hand of the Lord of glory. Anyone who wants to pray for me in that way, I welcome it!

There’s something that happens to us when we intercede for others, and when it flows out of an honest heart, I think of Job 42:10; finally, Job, having suffered so terribly, gives up his quest for answers. His conundrum was past finding out, so he crawls down from his ash heap and throws away the shingle that he had used to scratch his own boils; and here’s what we read, “... and when Job prayed for his friends, the Lord turned the fortunes of Job”.



My dear friend in Christ, God knows what you lost and what was taken away, He was there when you were shattered. When you were abandoned, when men were doing their worst. When the slanders were unrelenting, and the stones being thrown at you felt like boulders. But you are praying for your friend, and that's when God redeems the life of His servants, and restores.

Paul was in chains, his own future uncertain, but his burden wasn't for himself, it was for the Church at Philippi. He wanted God's best and finest for them. Again, he wanted them to abound more and more in the knowledge of Christ, (vs. 9) and (vs. 10) to have all discernment, being able to approve things that were excellent. He wanted no duplicity in their journey of faith, but rather they would be sincere, (vs. 10) and that they would be filled (vs. 11) with the fruits of righteousness. How precious, how beautiful that Paul loved the body of Christ, the Church at Philippi, in this way; and the Church loved him in that way, and we are called to love one another in that way.

As we continue to expound this entire book, all four chapters, our exposition needs to be informed, as we go from verse to verse, by the great love Paul had for the Philippians. Indeed, he was like a midwife unto them until Christ was formed in them. It was the Spirit of God that birthed the church, but Paul was there assisting like a midwife; and he was bound up in their welfare. Thus, Paul in this epistle, is concerned to allay the fears of the Philippians. They had learned of his imprisonment, and in the midst of his difficulty he says that adverse circumstances had actually advanced the cause of the Gospel. (Vs. 12) But I want you to know brethren that the things which have happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel. How true it is that "God makes the wrath of men to praise him".

David Seamands said, "Man's extremity is always God's opportunity, if we surrender it to Him." Paul says, again in vs. 12, that it had become clear to the entire Imperial Roman Guard that he was imprisoned and in chains for the sake of Christ. Bearing witness, sharing the Gospel, Paul's entire demeanor and temperament, with the love of Christ in his heart, gave strength and authenticity to the Gospel he was proclaiming. Apparently, the guards were engaged by Paul. Remember Paul was a Roman citizen and well educated. He was not charged with sedition. At this point he was no overt threat to the state. He was a man philosophically and theologically oriented, and he is sharing the beauty of the Gospel, and so that's the message Paul was explaining and sharing with the Roman soldiers guarding him.

In vs. 13 He says it's evident to the whole palace guard that my imprisonment is for Jesus Christ. Paul connected the dots. He has a strong witness in this circumstance. The Holy fruit of his faithful intentional witness and testimony, and the buoyant faith he was putting on display, actually emboldened many others, (vs. 14) "... to become much more bold in speaking the Word of God without hesitation born of fear." It certainly seems that Paul's imprisonment had led to an explosion of evangelistic fervor, and that others were speaking the Word of God forthrightly and without fear. Of course they knew the consequences of doing so, but they refused to be corralled by them. The natural knee-jerk reaction to persecution would be to draw back or tone things down, even fall to a guarded timidity where words might be measured, or things not said; in such a circumstance, some might dare to say that's wisdom; but not in this case. Paul here is showing all that suffering for Christ has its rewards, and that one of it's wonderful by products is

that it empowers others listen carefully; God never allows the suffering of his saints to be wasted – it emboldens others to share their faith and unbelievers who see that suffering begin to hear the Gospel differently.

Please note also, by the time of the writing of this prison epistle to the Philippians, Paul had been in prison two full years, so any novelty of being in prison would have worn off, but to the contrary Paul was still mounting up in the Spirit, as it were, being built up in his most Holy faith in a most unholy environment. Someone has said that in Christ we do suffer persecution, but we never suffer alone. God won't tolerate it. Christ keeps company with those who suffer for His name. Someone has put it like this, "adverse circumstances in the life of the saints always advertises Christ's faithfulness." It's so easy in adversity to draw back and to go with Job of old, climb up on that ash heap, stop all ministry, and sit with folded arms and demand answers. We begin to tell God we're not moving or doing one thing until He explains Himself. Beloved, God isn't big on explaining Himself. Now hear this very carefully, we often want, and even demand explanations, but that's exactly when He demands that we surrender. You see what happens to us isn't that important; it's what the Lord does with His gospel that's everything. Thus, the Pauline language we find here in chapter one is doxological. It evidences a mood of triumph. We find here a high mindedness, joy, excitement, energy, and this is not something that can be faked.

Notice vs. 15, 16, **"Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains;"**

In a nutshell, (and we'll come back to this next time) because Paul was in chains for the Gospel, it created a perceived vacuum, and there were other ministers, certainly not false prophets, but they sought to advantage themselves by drawing people to their ministries, seeking recognition, preeminence, and the applause of men. In other words, they were ministering in a way that would draw attention to themselves. It was one upmanship at its worst, and it was done deliberately ... supposing to 'add affliction to Paul's chains'. Ultimately Paul concluded, and you talk about high mindedness, this is it – Paul concluded that whether the Gospel was proclaimed in pretense or in truth, he simply rejoiced that Christ was being proclaimed. Paul wasn't concerned about losing his crown, or the affections of men running to another preacher, rather he was concerned that Christ was being proclaimed and glorified, because Paul knew that the Gospel's effectiveness is not really hampered by the wrong motive of a preacher. Now Luther dealt with this rather extensively. Luther felt, and taught, that while all ministers would want to be capable and educated as much as possible, walking in right relatedness to Jesus Christ, he also taught that ultimately those things do not hamper the Gospel. The Gospel gets results whether it's flowing from a charlatan shyster, i.e. an Elmer Gantry type, or not. On the face of it, this is a very liberal view. For Paul, the only thing that mattered was that Christ was being proclaimed.

Close your Bibles. You know I've taught preaching here, there, and yonder, and I learned a long time ago that lack of education in a devoted man of God does not diminish his effectiveness. However, I've also observed that small minded men, self-consumed and often concerned about image, nevertheless can preach and be used wonderfully by God, though most

often they don't find it fulfilling. The point of this passage is the efficacy of the Gospel. God can take His Word and accomplish anything He wants to do, especially bringing the lost into true salvation.

You think about that! Amen.

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## THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(4)

### HE WHO DIES WITH THE MOST TOYS – MEANS NOTHING!

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

2/19/24

Philippians 1:12-25

Last time I made just a few cursory comments on my exposition on Philippians 1:15-16. I want us to come back and look at this verse again. “Some indeed preach Christ, even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: the former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains.” Some preachers are rotten. Apparently, there were those preachers in Rome who assumed that with Paul out of the way, i.e. imprisoned, that they could co-opt his followers and enlarge their own tent as it were. These preachers were not apostates, they just weren’t men of integrity. They were opportunists. They wanted a big crowd and the accolades of men, and so their motivation for ministry was sourced in selfish ambition. They had no personal love for Paul. Paul was the competition. These men were hoping to draw many to themselves and plant churches, and they fully intended to anguish Paul by what they were doing. They understood Paul’s authoritative office, but were dismissive of it. In effect they were trying to wear his suit jacket, and trying to position themselves so that they would be perceived as being equal to Paul. In effect they were showboating opportunists. They wanted to be perceived as being Godly and spiritual, but their motivations were not pure.

Paul did not call them out by name, other than to expose what they were doing; but he didn’t call for any action against them, rather he simply said that despite their motives, whether in pretense or in truth, (Philippians 1:18) that Christ was being preached. It is true, God makes the wrath of men to praise Him, and Paul prayed, that despite erring motives, corrupted motives, that Christ would do a great work wherever He was being proclaimed.

About a year ago someone sent me a 6-page single print statement from a church of about a thousand members that was looking for a Pastor. People know that I’m always looking for sermon illustrations and this was a good one. For whatever reasons I read it word for word and came across this on the page.

*“If the church doesn’t grow you go.”*

In other words, the leadership of the church was making it very clear that any tenure in that ministry would be predicated on numerical growth, meaning that minister better produce. By the way, when I read that long and lengthy document, I thought this is where a 36-year-old preacher could come with a young family and get beat down and ground under in 6 years. Many ministers are insecure and do want to be lifted up and experience some celebrity status. There are churches that are big, and if they don’t stay big, the minister is toast.

I love the story of Chuck Swindoll, after coming out of the Marine Corps, he went straight to seminary without going to college; you could still do that in 1960. Then he took a little satellite

church in Dallas for a couple of years, then was off to New England to a church of about 400 people on Sunday mornings in a suburban country area with a beautiful parsonage. He and his wife Cynthia loved it, until one day the parsonage committee said, “Chuck, you’re a beautiful man, but we can’t handle your preaching.” He was a part of a small denomination, i.e. the Evangelical Free Church, and he wound up going to Fullerton, California, and he inherited a building built in 1950, it was small, and the few members that remained there had a curator’s mentality – they were there to preserve what remained, and to make sure that nothing changed. It was parochialism at its worst. Of course, the 5 big words that got used frequently in those initial weeks were, “We’ve never done it that way before.” Which when spoken was code for ‘we are not going to do that at all’.

Mr. Swindoll decided that he would love them into submission, but he knew his preaching had been an issue before, so he decided to change it, and after 6 weeks of rehearsing his sermons for hours every Saturday night in the old sanctuary, he could not change his proclamation style. There was nothing alive about the ministry, death was all over the place. He asked his wife if she was all right with him leaving the ministry, and they prayed and surrendered to it. That’s when it happened!

I sat in a room with 40 other men and listened to this story. The following week 10 new people came, and the next week 30 new people came, and within a month 93 people that were originally there turned into 250 people, within a few months 450 people, and within another few months nearly 1,400 people were trying to come there. Swindoll said he had a whole new problem; he wasn’t really living the dream. He said, “I was chasing my tail nearly 90 hours a week, and the leadership was ready to lower the boom if I tried to hire anybody”. He stood before the congregation and said, “I’ll be dead in another two months”. He asked for anybody with a willingness to participate in an open forum as to how the ministry could be managed. He hired what was needed. Several board members resigned. They were not missed.

Within another year, 2,500 people were worshipping there. They were doing services on Thursday nights, Saturday mornings, Saturday nights, 3 services on Sunday, and they were building a building. This is the only time in my life that I ever heard a minister of preeminence share something like this. He said he got up one morning about 7 years later, he had a mega church and a national radio broadcast, and if he thought about the people on payroll he couldn’t sleep, but then he got a lot of anxiety about how to sustain it, and how he needed to measure his words, and that perhaps he should tone certain things down because he needed to keep his crowd. Swindoll looked at us and said, that he went to his knees and told both God and the devil that he didn’t make this happen, and that he was clueless as to how to sustain it, and that it was God’s ministry and that whether it would be a church with ordination, that is endure or become short lived, that was on God. Swindoll said from that moment on, he never gave a thought to the ministry coming apart, or his own need to be cautious in maintaining this church.

Beloved, big-time ministry can bring with it, big, big-time issues. There are men that would sell their souls to have a big platform and be in the limelight, to be a Christian celebrity. There were people in Paul’s day trying to steal his crowd, but instead, Paul reveled and delighted that Christ was simply being preached, even if the motives of some were corrupted.

Swindoll went on to say that all of that success happened not because he reinvented himself or changed his preaching, but because of sovereign choice. In other words, Swindoll was made to know that God did the work and it had nothing to do with Swindoll, but everything to do with God's eternal plan that would unfold in the lives of many through the preaching of the Gospel.

My experience of ministry is that most men of God are not phoney. 97 % of ministries in America are small struggling fellowships, and the Pastors are faithful and humble men. God wants ministers to be motivated for the right reasons, for the glorious Christ, but the men who Paul was referring to here were not noble high-minded men; and the ministry will always have some in it like that. Of course, the flip side of the coin is that there were men preaching the Gospel and doing so in love; men who no doubt were calling upon the saints to remember Paul in their prayers, and were eager to see him freed from prison, and perhaps be back among them preaching the Gospel.

Now come to vs. 19. We have seen that Paul has chosen to rejoice whenever the Gospel advances through preaching, and now beginning in this verse, he chooses to rejoice even as he faces an unknown future. Paul of course is a prisoner under the tyranny of unjust rulers and anything could happen. Obviously, he is hoping for the best ... (vs. 19) "but I know that this will turn out for my deliverance if you will be faithful in prayer for me, and if I'm continually sustained by the Holy Spirit." You know in Psalm 34:3-5, David says, "I sought the Lord and He answered me and delivered me from all of my fears. Those who look to Him shall be radiant and their faces shall never be ashamed." Paul in this circumstance expresses his concern, (vs. 20) "In nothing I shall be ashamed." Paul here was not worried about his own humiliation, rather Paul was burdened to stand tall in the ordeal, and to be faithful to the Gospel should he come to trial or not; or should he be given a death sentence.

Remember, Paul was there when Stephen was stoned, and Stephen died with dignity, he died with courage, glorifying Christ; and Paul watching Stephen probably has this in mind when he expresses how he wants to conduct himself whether it's a trial and death, or even release. This is his eager expectation, (vs. 20) "...according to my earnest expectation", by the way, the Greek word here (*apokaradokia*) is translated eager expectation; it pictures a person straining his neck to see what is ahead. Paul didn't want to miss out on what God was doing, and he wanted to be in good form, we'd say, he didn't want to fumble the ball, or be halting or hesitating; he represented the Gospel Christ, he wanted to be in strength, he wanted to be in Christ's best. We really need that kind of mindset. It's really not about us, it's about Him. Paul was concerned that if the verdict went against him, that Christ would be glorified in his own martyrdom. If on the other hand he was set free, and by the way that is what happened following his imprisonment in Acts 28, which meant more fruitful labor for Paul, but then he was arrested 3 years later and executed by Nero. This is Paul's burden, this was his big concern, namely to conduct himself in a way that people could see Christ in him the hope of glory.

Now come to vs. 21, and this is a text that I use frequently when I preach funerals. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Beloved, that's a hard sell in this culture. In this culture to live is gain, and to die is terrible loss. The world lives by a different kind of philosophy namely, "He who dies with the most toys wins." To the contrary, he who dies with the most toys

and without Christ is a fool. Beloved, He who dies with the most toys – doesn't take them with him. What's that old saying, you never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul-it.

Next time we're going to consider the second part of vs. 22 where Paul says, "to die is gain"; and I want to show us 'gain'. I want to talk about the 'far country', 'Beulah Land', namely Heaven. But for our purposes in this study this evening, consider again this text and its context. Paul says that "for me to live is Christ", meaning that if God in His providential design delivered Paul from his Roman imprisonment (which He did) then that would mean fruitful service for the Philippians, and perhaps additional missionary journeys for Paul, the founding of more churches, seeing the Gospel of Christ making greater inroads in nations yet to be visited. Paul saw his life in service to Kingdom purposes. Beloved, it behooves all of us to save a little extra time, juice, and energy for Kingdom purposes.

I may sound like the Cincinnati curmudgeon; I've been in ministry for nearly 55 years, and I know what it's like to stand and beg and beg for volunteers and no one comes forward, and I can't help but wonder, what is everyone doing with their time? In our culture, I've had many people in utter brazenness say to me, "It is an unreasonable expectation to assume that I can come to church every Sunday. Sometimes my weekends have to be given for personal things and family." The real problem with many believers is that they never settled the issue of 'first things first'. Does the Kingdom of God have a claim on your life? Have you ever said to God, the words of Isaiah when he saw the Lord in the Temple, "Here am I, send me." How available are you to God? Where are you losing your life for His sake. You may write this off as sheer preacher talk, but the Bible teaches that all of us will have to stand before the assuage of God and give an account. Please, please do not make peace with being the kind of Christian that goes to church on Sundays and that's it. Are you on an evangelistic outreach team? Do you volunteer for any mission like Matthew 25, The Lord's Gym, or City Gospel Mission? Have you ever thought about giving yourself to short term mission trips, innovating a Sunday school program, or taking on a major project that would bless your local church in some way?

We must not become Christians who live 24/7 in a feeding frenzy, imbibing on the world and on the things that only concern us. Forget about trying to get the most toys, but rather "lay up treasures for yourself in Heaven". Have you ever gone to your Pastor and said, 'I want to be a real blessing to this congregation, what can I do?'; and really mean it. How easy it is beloved, to become 'at ease in Zion'; to come to a worship service and go home and thump our chest, and then invest every waking minute absorbed in our own self-interest, in our company, or in our business. Our lives as true believers should be characterized by an otherworldliness!

Are you really understanding this? Some people will not allow themselves to come under conviction and it's when the Holy Spirit convicts us that we change. Otherwise, here's your biography; especially if you're doing well: There will come a moment when after 40 years of working 24/7, you'll build a second home in a faraway state, take exotic trips, live a life of play from the time of your retirement until you die; 18 or 25 years, if not more. You will say, 'I was blessed'; and you were. But where did you invest yourself for the Kingdom? Paul said, "for me to live is Christ", meaning he would go on providing fruitful labor for the Philippians, and many others. Can you say that? Namely, "for me to live is Christ", which means it will result in

fruitful labor for Christ on behalf of others. You do not have to go in search of a platform; witness to a colleague, send a card to someone sick, visit a friend in a hospital, go volunteer in your church, teach Sunday school, lead a Bible study under the authority of your church and Pastor. Ask God to refresh your love for the scriptures, and to create a new romance in your heart that you may serve the Lord with gladness.

Again, Paul said, for me to live is Christ; meaning, that additional years would result in more fruitful labor on behalf of the Philippians and many other believers, not to mention his high calling of taking the Gospel to Gentile nations. Will tomorrow result with you living in this way? Or will you be at the office at 7 a. m and go home at 9 p. m. 6 days a week; or fill your weekends with so much play that you'll hardly have time for a 1-hour worship service? This may not be the way to win friends and influence enemies, but sometimes we have to talk plain, and the Word of God can really cut deep at times. God's church is to be "glorious as a mighty army with banners", filled with good soldiers of Christ who will endure hardship; sadly, it appears that many are A.W.O.L. – absent without leave.

I want to close with this story. Years ago in my last church, and we were worshipping about 150-160 people. I was desperate for Sunday school teachers and people to help with the kids on Sunday morning. I decided to be unrelenting from the pulpit. If I had to take 10-15 minutes pleading; I would. Then came a blasting letter. This woman said, 'I'm out of here'. She was put off by the pleas, rather than saying, 'Pastor Ed, let's get some people together and really start praying about this. I'll do what I can as a stop-gap measure.' By the way, her letter was very uncharitable. She wasn't content to go by herself, and while she didn't pull others out of the church, she did poison the well. Some days I'm so glad I became a Christian before I met one.

Think about what I've just said, what if she had come to me and said, 'For the immediate, I'll stand in the gap; and let's get a few people together Sunday morning or right after church, hold hands and pray that God will raise up people.' Isn't it amazing how few people are willing to give God any time at all, except for a Sunday morning worship service. I hope you're not one. This might just be a convicting thought that you need.

You think about that! Amen.

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## THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(5)

### TO DIE IS GAIN - HOW SO?

*(Your questions about Heaven answered.)*

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

2/26/24

Philippians 1:22b

Tonight, I want to focus my thoughts on Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Last time we noted the first part of that verse and how Paul viewed his life, that if allowed to go on living it would mean fruitful service for the Philippians and many others. But Paul really was not sure of the outcome as to whether he would be released from prison, or executed. Happily, the imprisonment he is referring to in Philippians 1 is also referred to in Acts 28; and Paul was released. Thus, he rendered more fruitful service living for Christ. And we hammered on that theme. In a nutshell, save a little bologna for the Kingdom of God.

But for our purpose, it’s the second part of this verse that becomes our focus, which says, “to die is gain”. In our culture death is not gain, it’s the ultimate loss, trying to convince people that death is gain is almost an impossible sell. But for the believer, death is not just gain, it’s great gain, and apart from the Lord coming for us in the rapture and second coming, all of us will die.

Years ago, I heard a comedian say, “Live every day as if you’re going to die, and one day you will.” Death runs in your family, and mine. We cannot allow death to take us unawares. The Bible says in the Book of Hebrews “it is appointed unto man once to die”, but death is swallowed up through faith in Jesus Christ. Historically the church has rejected all notions of ‘soul sleep’. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. There is what we call the intermediate state; and the Bible has a lot to say about Heaven. Tonight, I want to answer some big questions that are often asked about life in the afterlife.

- 1. First, who goes there?** All that are in Christ, all that have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. The old English Divines called Heaven the Far Country, and/or Beulah Land. But most of the time they called it, “the saint’s everlasting rest”. But in what sense is Heaven an everlasting rest? How did those great old Puritan Divines understand it? Heaven is rest, not in some suspended state of mental existence only, rather it is rest from a world like ours where there’s so much warfare and opposition from men and devils. It’s rest from inordinate demands and all the unfairnesses that can mount an offense against us in this life. It is rest from disease, heartbreak, and loss. It is rest from broken relationships and the cruelties of men that can be perpetrated against those that are weak and less fortunate. Heaven is rest and deliverance from a world where everyday savagery and cruelty seem to find expression all around us; things like school shootings, suicide, wars, terrible accidents that take the lives of unsuspecting people. Heaven is rest, deliverance from all of that.

Beloved, your eternal life began the moment you believed on Christ, “for the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.” Way back yonder when you believed on Jesus – that’s when your eternal life started.

**2. Another question; when we arrive in Heaven will we remember our life on earth?**

Beloved, it is eternal life, not another life. Here is a foundational insight into the eternal Kingdom. In Heaven we have cognitive continuity, you will remember your life on earth, and you will continue to be you in your life in Heaven. The Bible teaches that in Heaven we will know even as we are known, meaning that we will recognize one another, and Heaven is described as a great banqueting table where people will laugh the laughter of the redeemed.

I come from the south where food was a sacrament. On Sunday afternoons, especially in the late spring and summer, families would get together. Long tables would be set up outside. It would look like Belteshazzar’s feast, sometimes 30 people eating at once; and in the stories that were shared, the history of the family was brought forward, and there was much laughter in the funny stories – I learned so much, and when I think of my family, all of whom are now in Beulah Land, when I think of life there, I think of those great feasting times we had on the farm. I think of all the people and loved ones that we will be reunited with. I have a great list ... Russ Coburn, Bill Jenike, Ralph Marinacci, Jenny Martina, Bill Buckley, Charlie Dodge and Ed Sassy. Just names, but people that poured into my life and powerfully affected my journey of faith. Oh beloved, on that day I will see my mother and my dad, my grandfather Bonniwell, my first wife Faith - all of my mother’s sisters and brothers, all of my grandfather’s sisters and brothers and their children – all of whom are dead, and more importantly I will see Him, and you will see Him.

**3. Another question, what happens to us the moment we enter Heaven? John says ...**

“When we see Him, we shall be made like unto Him.” In a moment we shall all be changed. How are we going to be changed, how are we going to be made like unto Him? First, we will be made like unto Him in knowledge, in that hour, given this third work of grace, (i.e. the first work of grace is getting saved, then comes a lifetime of sanctification, then comes, at the moment of our death, glorification). The old hymn writer said, “Oh that will be glory for me”, and when we’re glorified, we will become like Jesus Christ in knowledge. We will know everything on that day. Our questions will get answered, our conundrums, and all the things we couldn’t understand in this life will be revealed.

**4. Moreover, we will be made like unto Him in Holy love – no more broken relationships.**

**5. We will be made like unto Him as our life will be a reflection of His.** We will be continually recognized as having been with Jesus. We will be made like unto Him in our understanding; the eternal God, the eternal purposes, the decrees and providential designs ordained in eternity past, will in that hour become our present possession.

6. **Another question, is Heaven a place and if so, how big is it?** Let me also say dear ones, that Heaven is a place. Jesus said, “I go away to prepare a place for you.” Did you hear that? ... “a place for you”, and “I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am you may be also.” Was Jesus delusional? Can we believe this? Yes. If we believe what He said in the sermon on the Mount, and all the other things that He proclaimed in His earthly ministry, then we should be able to believe that.

I’ve shared this too often in my funeral services through the years; a group of Mathematicians at the University of Chicago postulated that if Heaven, as described in the Book of Revelation, is in fact a cube, 1,400 miles wide, 1,400 miles long, and 1,400 miles high; they tabulated that if every person who ever lived on the face of the earth, some 108 billion people, every family would have approximately 188 square miles of estate. Think about that. Heaven is indeed commodious; it’s described as a place with rivers and seas and mountains.

By the way, the devil’s been there. I bet you didn’t know that. Job chapter 1:6, “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came among them.” And this little pow-wow took place in glory. Moreover, Satan once was the anointed cherub that covereth. (Ezekiel 28:12-15) He was Heaven’s choir director. Rodney Dukes used to tell me when Satan got kicked out of Heaven, he fell into the choir loft.

In Ezekiel 28 we have a lamentation for the King of Tyre, but it also is a passage that reveals Satan as one who was in the Garden of Eden. (Ezekiel 28:12b) He was commended for his workmanship in timbrels and pipes which had been “prepared for him on the day that he was created”. Let this inform your cosmology, Satan is a created being, and he has been placed in subservience to God. Whatever power he exercises, it’s only because he’s permitted to do so. Satan is not autonomous.

We are told in vs. 14, “You were the anointed cherub that covers, and you were on the Holy Mountain of God, and you walked back and forth in the midst of the God who is a consuming fire. Vs. 15 says he was perfect in his ways from the day he was created until iniquity was found in him. We’re told in vs. 16 that he sinned. God said, “therefore I cast you out as a profane thing; out of the Mountain of God, and I destroyed you oh covering cherub from the midst of the fiery presence. Your heart was lifted up (vs. 17) because of your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; and I cast you to the ground.”

How sad that the devil believes in Heaven and many that sit in our pews don’t. Jesus rebuked the Sadducees who were theological rationalists and did not believe in Heaven, and accepted only the first five books of the Bible; our Lord shamed them publicly, pulling a text from the Book of Genesis, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the

living – He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Jesus was telling them plainly that they were still alive, at the transfiguration Moses and Elijah stepped out of glory.

When the Witch of Endor conjured Samuel the Prophet, she was expecting a demon; God allowed Samuel to step from glory to give a harsh prophetic word to King Saul. Do you know that death is described as an enemy in the Bible? But for the believer, as C. S. Lewis said, “death is no more than getting up and walking from the living room into the kitchen, it’s just stepping through the door, or a ceiling marker.

**7. Another question, when we enter Heaven to what extent are we made emotionally whole?**

In Heaven, all of our scars are going to be healed, and all the terrible things that damaged us will be removed, not one broken person will be there. Not one annoying saint, every believer in Heaven will be a healthy whole well integrated personality, completely restored. We are going to be radical new creatures.

There has to be a Heaven, because this world is a veil of tears. The Old Testament saints confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth, and that they were not home yet. They were looking for a better country. The Old Testament saints often looked beyond the grave, as did Job, who when in the midst of his torment and suffering said, “I know my redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth.” (Now get this.) “And after my skin is destroyed, I know that in my flesh I shall see God.” You understand what he is saying, in death he will be recreated, reconfigured and having cognitive continuity, he will see God. (Genesis 19:25, 26)

**8. Another question – when we arrive in Heaven, are we turned into angels?** Many people think that when you die you become an angel. This comes from a misunderstanding of Matthew 22:30, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in Heaven.” Now this has sparked many questions. But the analogy is simply Jesus’ way of saying marriage does not exist in Heaven. Angels do not marry. We do not become Angels because Angels are created beings, Angels do not really understand justification by faith. Which speaks of our salvation and of things that Angels desire to look into. (I Peter 1:12)

**9. Here’s another big question frequently asked – if we arrive in Heaven and loved ones are not there, would that not produce great sorrow, and doesn’t God dry all of our tears in Heaven?** When we arrive in Heaven we arrive with cognitive continuity; we remember all of our loved ones on earth, and it could be that those who preceded us in death are not there, meaning they are in Hell. Can Heaven be Heaven for us if we know that while we are living in glory, people we loved are suffering the torments of Hell for all eternity? Interestingly enough the Bible does not speak to this.

Perhaps the best series on Heaven that I've ever heard is by Charles Stanley. It just so happened that I visited his church on the Sunday when he dealt with this very subject. He said that he believes God lifts this from our memory as if we never knew them. I've tried to believe that. In fact, sometimes I find myself believing it; but quite frankly, in our glorified state, wherein we will share in God's omniscience, His all knowingness, we will be able to handle the hard truth that someone we loved never believed on Christ, and now must live in eternal darkness. Then we will be able to let that go.

On earth when we lose loved ones, as I lost a spouse, or as Billie lost her son in war, eventually we're able to let go of it and keep on living. I think in Heaven it's the same way, especially in a glorified state where the fullness of God and His divine enabling will be our every moment present possession. In Heaven, God is going to wipe away every tear, and there'll be no more death or sorrow or crying. There will be no more pain, beloved, and all the former things are going to be wiped away.

**10. Do we go to Heaven as believers the moment that we die, or do we sleep in the earth until the final resurrection?** Sadly, there are cults and a few denominations that teach the doctrine of Soul sleep, i.e. the Seventh Day Adventists, the Oneness Pentecostal Movement are examples. Historically the church has rejected this idea.

At the moment of death, we enter into the intermediate state; while the body experiences corruption, our soul and Spirit enters into Heaven until that moment, when the Lord returns; for then the dead in Christ are raised, and those returning from Heaven are reunited with that body. Again, we continue on; except that body also is glorified. You will not find the word intermediate in the scriptures, but certainly the thrust of scripture teaches that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. If you don't think there is such a spiritual thing as a spiritual body, then think of Moses and Elijah when they stepped out of glory at the transfiguration. Then of course, there was the great prophet Samuel who manifested to Saul; Samuel was living in glory for many years before Saul went the way of all flesh.

Sometimes I am a real stinker. The other day I had a friend in the car and we drove past a very large cemetery. I turned and said, "What an irony, there isn't one soul there". Because when we die, we are taken to glory, or fall to the torments of Hell.

**11. How are we to think about Heaven as a place?** Heaven is going to be so unbelievably beautiful. (Revelation 21:9ff) <sup>9</sup>"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife. <sup>10</sup>And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the Holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God, <sup>11</sup>having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." How revealing this great text.

What follows in this chapter is an incredible description of Heaven. We're told in vs. 12 that Heaven has a great and high wall with 12 gates, and 12 angels attend those gates, and names are written on those gates; namely the 12 tribes of Israel. There are 3 gates on the east, 3 gates on the north, 3 gates on the south, and 3 gates on the west. Moreover, vs. 14, "the walls of the city had 12 foundations and in them were the names of the 12 Apostles of the Lamb."

The city is laid out as a square. (vs. 16) 12,000 furlongs, its length, breadth, and height are all equal. In other words, 1,400 miles long, 1,400 miles wide, 1,400 miles high. The foundations of the walls of the city are adorned with all kinds of precious stones, i.e. jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolyte, beryl, topaz, chrysoprasus, jacinth, and amethyst. Here's something amazing in vs. 21, the 12 gates were 12 pearls; and each individual gate was of one pearl; and the street of the city was pure gold like transparent glass.

This is a description that makes it challenging for our imagination; it is ultimate beauty, and it is to be appreciated. This is our anticipated home, but as glorious as it is, it cannot compare to the altogether lovely one, the Lamb of God our Savior and the High King of Heaven, who though reigning now, will one day return to this earth; and then the Kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Heaven is desirable not because it is beautiful beyond description, but because our Savior is there. Altogether lovely, preeminent, and has called us into an eternity of fellowship with Himself. The physical beauty of Heaven is a symbol of the greater beauty found in the utter supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, there's another thing about Heaven that's been noted. Revelation 21:22, John writes, "I saw no Temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its Temple." There is no Temple in Heaven as Christ Himself is the Temple. He is the place of worship. A Temple is a place where you go to worship, John is saying in Heaven when we worship, we will worship in the very presence of God. Christ is the place of worship.

**12. What do we do in Heaven?** Some people think that in Heaven we float around on clouds and play harps. That doesn't make sense. When Heaven was on earth, i.e. the Garden of Eden, God gave man work before 'the fall'. Here's another revealing verse about the glory of Heaven, Revelation 22:3-5, "<sup>3</sup>And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve him. <sup>4</sup>They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever."

Our Roman Catholic friends believe that when they die, they go to purgatory, and they have to be prayed out. There in their suffering they are purified and outfitted for Heaven. Nothing in scripture even hints at purgatory. Christ made a full and complete and all

sufficient sacrifice for our sins. All of our sins were judged at Calvary; past present and future. However, we are still in a body of death. You've heard me say it many times, and Luther was right, even though we're in Christ, we are *Simul Justus et Peccator*, saved and a sinner at the same time, except we hate our sin. God has made provision for the sinning saint, and we are all sinning saints ... "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We are to live a life of repentance. Like the ancient priests, every day we should draw near; and as they washed in the golden laver, we are washed in the blood when we ask for forgiveness; for we have forgiveness through the blood, like Paul says in Ephesians.

Then, when we are taken into Heaven, we no longer sin. There'll be no room for improvement because you will ultimately be improved. The point of all of this is that in Christ, that is through faith in Christ and His imputed righteousness, and the application of the finished work of Christ on the cross, which we appropriate by faith, means that at the moment of death we are taken into glory. Someday when Christ returns the dead in Christ will be raised, and our corruptible bodies, bodies alone which sleep in the earth, i.e. which are decaying in the earth, will be reunited with our soul and spirit; and that will end the so-called intermediate state.

Another thing that I want to bring out is that the relationship that we have with Christ on earth, is what we take into Heaven with us. I believe this is why Paul said, "Oh that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection." Paul wanted to know Christ deeply.

**13. Once we arrive in Heaven, are crowns and rewards given out?** I want to point out that in Heaven there are crowns and awards. (5 crowns; David Jeremiah)

**1) The Victor's Crown (1 Corinthians 9:25-27)**

"Self-discipline requires the ability to say 'No' when necessary—and not just to things that are sinful. As the saying goes, "The good is the enemy of the best." Serving God involves narrowing our focus to those things with the highest eternal value. Life is full of good things that take our focus off the best Christ has to offer. It is up to us to identify them and choose accordingly. Those who exercise such discipline will receive the Victor's Crown.

*Think about how you spend your time, money, and talents. Do your habits reflect service to God, or do they indicate other priorities?"*

**2) The Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19)**

"This crown is awarded to those who bring others to Christ. It's often called the Soul-Winner's Crown, and it's the reward given to those who reach out beyond themselves and lead others to heaven.

*When was the last time you talked about Jesus to someone who wasn't a Christian?"*

### **3) The Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8)**

“Many Christians become so caught up with earthly activities that they forget heaven is their true home. This crown is not for those believers. It is for those who long for heaven, their true home, who long to see the face of their Savior when He comes for them in the clouds.

*What aspect(s) of heaven do you most look forward to?"*

### **4) The Crown of Life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10)**

“Believers who maintain their love for Christ while triumphing over persecution, temptation, and even martyrdom, receive this crown. Many people will receive this crown because they gave their life for their faith, but there will be others wearing this crown too. Any believer who has kept the faith when it was costly to do so—anyone who has suffered, endured, persevered, and encouraged others—will receive the Crown of Life.

*How have you suffered for the sake of the Gospel?"*

### **5) The Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4)**

“This crown is given to faithful shepherds of God’s people—pastors, elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, ministry team leaders, and more. It will reward those who answer the call of leadership.

Jesus said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37). *How have you responded to this need? Pray to the Lord, asking Him to send more shepherds for His people.*

Every Christian should pursue these rewards, but no crown could ever compare to the splendor of seeing our Lord and Savior face to face. And until that day, we have a responsibility to run the spiritual race with all the determination and devotion of an Olympic athlete.

Every Christian should pursue these rewards, but no crown could ever compare to the splendor of seeing our Lord and Savior face to face.”

“The five Heavenly crowns described in the Bible will be awarded to faithful believers. If we live wholeheartedly for Christ, we will receive a crown to cast at the feet of Jesus in Heaven.”



The glories of Heaven are not totally disclosed in the Bible. There are things about Heaven, indeed many things about Heaven, that are not revealed. Remember the secret things belong to our God, but the things revealed belong to us. What belongs to us is what God reveals in the Bible about Heaven ... not somebody else. We have had a flurry of people writing books about how they died, came back to life, and all that they saw ... many are not Christian. The Bible teaches us that at the moment of death, the soul departs, and that the dead return no more. When you read such materials and people are revealing all kinds of things that are not compatible with historic Christian faith, give it no credence. Remember Paul when he was stoned and caught up into the third Heaven ...? Turn to II Corinthians 12, and here in vs. 1ff we have Paul reflecting on what happened to him when he was stoned at Derbe. He says in vs. 2 that 14 years prior to writing this that he was caught up into the third Heaven, and (vs. 4) heard inexpressible words, which is not lawful for man to utter or to know. Because of those revelations that he was not permitted to reveal, what he calls an abundance of revelations, he was given a thorn in the flesh, lest he be exalted above measure.

Beloved, there's a lot about the Spirit world, the world of Heaven and the realm of darkness, that we do not know; but let us be content with what has been revealed. Beloved, at the moment of death Christ comes for His own. Jesus says, "He who believes in me will never die." He says, "... let not your heart be troubled about death – believe in me." Paul says that "we know if this earthly tent be destroyed, (this body) then we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens." As my good friend and mentor Ralph Marinacci used to say ... "Ed, if this carton goes down, I'm going up."

Think of this, our faith in Christ, when we close our eyes in death will mean that in the twinkling of an eye, a blink, we shall find ourselves, in the eternal Kingdom. You're not going to get there by lighting candles, hoping your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, or being in church every time the doors are opened. You'll not be in that eternal Kingdom because you spent your life trying to be a good person, or, listen very carefully, simply because you believed in Jesus. The devil believes in Jesus, and many people believe he was a great man that he actually lived, and that he was a great teacher. You will go to Heaven because you believed on Christ as your sin substitute knowing that He died in your place, and believing upon Him who died and rose again on the third day; and because you were transformed and brought forth fruits worthy of repentance, that my friend, will grant you entrance into the eternal Kingdom. Do you know that you have this kind of salvation? If you're uncertain at all simply say this prayer in your heart: "Lord Jesus tonight I believe in you and that you died for me. I ask for the gift of eternal life which is found in Christ."

Beloved, there is no Heaven on this earth, but there is a Heaven. Think of the people that are there; Mary and Joseph, all the disciples, Paul, all the unknown saints of antiquity, the great church fathers, the Puritan Divines like John Owen, Thomas Watson, Matthew Henry, and of course the Magisterial Reformers, Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, C.S. Lewis, Malcom Muggeridge, John Bunyan, not to mention a host of low rent sinners made saints by the incomparable grace of Jesus Christ.

If we were having a worship service, I would end the service on this great song; “I’ve got a mansion just over the hilltop in that bright land where we’ll never grow old. And someday yonder we will never more wander, but walk on streets that are purest gold.”

I would that all of you would come to your grave in a ripe old age, or that you would be alive when the rapture occurs. Nevertheless, should we close our eyes in death, in those moments we can rest in the full assurance that having been justified by faith in Christ, we have a home in glory. Paul says, “We know that if this earthly tent be destroyed, then we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.” Having a deep inner certainty, i.e. full assurance of our salvation is the believer’s privilege.

Do you have such assurance? Perhaps you believe all of this is true, but you are still left with anxiety. Right now, tell the Lord this, and ask Him to make this certainty of Heaven a present possession, as a matter of deep conviction. God isn’t going to pull a fast one on you, and at the last moment abandon you when you have believed on Him, and have loved Him year after decade. His love for you is militant and unending. He will come for you.

Here ends the lesson.

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## THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(6)

### PREVAILING GOD’S WAY WHEN OPPOSITION COMES

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

3/4/24

Philippians 1:21-27

Last time we focused entirely on vs. 21. Paul, you recall, was in prison in Rome; an imprisonment that is described for us in Acts chapter 28. Paul was uncertain about his future; thus, he tells us if he is permitted to live, that would mean more fruitful service in the Lord’s vineyard, but if not, he would go and be with the Lord; and that would be great gain. Listen to what he says in vs. 22, “But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what shall I choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two. (In other words, the two options, i.e. to go on living and serving the Lord, or, “to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”) Paul here clearly expresses his preference, for he says again in vs. 23, “To be with Christ is far better.”

When you look at the Greek words that are here in this sentence, Paul piles on the comparatives to intensify the sense of how much better it would be to be with Christ. A woodenly literal translation of the phrase “far better”, found in vs. 23, would be ‘much more better’ ... *pollo mallon, kreisson*, but of course Paul factors in the needs of the Philippians, which in his mind sort of tilted the scale towards remaining in the flesh, because it was more necessary for their good. Suffice it to say Paul knew that his personal desires had to be subordinated to God’s will. It seems that Paul feels that his ministry on earth was not yet complete, and that he needed to remain in the body to help the churches grow and solidify. This is an example of great altruism, because here Paul is placing his fellow believer’s needs above his own. Again, I am captivated by Paul’s passion for the church; wanting, indeed yearning, that to live on would be to use each day to provide fruitful labor in the Lord’s vineyard. We’re all going to get spent on something, but using some of our time for Kingdom purposes, always carries the approbation of Heaven.

As Paul thinks about the Philippians and the work that yet needed to be done in them, and in the church, he sort of reveals his deck of cards. Look at vs. 24, nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. Paul could see that the saints there needed to be disciplined, taken deeper into the Word of God, and brought to maturity in the faith. Leadership needed to be cultivated in the church, bondservants had to be trained, leadership put in place for the building up of the body. Paul once said to the Galatians, “I was like a midwife unto you until Christ be formed in you.” Paul viewed himself as a midwife, someone caring for them as a ‘father in the faith’, raising up those who would come into complete spiritual maturity.

Then in vs. 25, he seems to be in possession of a renewed confidence that he would remain and continue with the Philippians for their progress and joy in the faith. Of course, that’s what

happened. Paul's imprisonment in Rome lasted just a little over 2 years; then he was released. He began to invest in churches, and the church at Philippi. He knew that his release would mean great joy for the Philippians, because he was their mentor and spiritual father – he had been their midwife. There's always a special place of affection in our hearts towards those who have helped to bring us into the Kingdom. Paul understood that the hearts of the Philippians would be made glad by his release so that he would come to them again.

Beloved, love those that mentor you and who help to bring you into the Kingdom. Sometimes we can think they are going to be there forever, and then suddenly, "Their place remembers them no more." I've had great mentors in my life, and I mean great mentors. But they are now all gone. But now I have picked up the gauntlet, and it's my burden to mentor and disciple. Attempting to strengthen all in "the faith once delivered unto the saints." I want to be like a midwife until Christ is formed in all of you, and each of you in turn can mentor and strengthen another.

I'm embarrassed to share this; he's dead now and so is his wife. He had a tremendous working knowledge of how to disciple people. He developed extraordinary materials, but sadly he was not a good teacher. He came to me one day and said, I would like for you to consider being my mentor. He was at least 10 years older than I was, and stupid me, I wondered how that would work and what I would do; yet, I myself have had an array of mentors in my life. I regret that; I realize now that possibly I could have helped him, given some deep hurt in his life. Perhaps I might have strengthened him in teaching methodologies – he had great knowledge; but he just couldn't put it across clearly or in an interesting way. He was lonely and he needed a friend, and I wasn't there. Frankly, I didn't know how I would find the time to meet and invest in him; but I should've found it.

I know there are seasons to life, but just getting up on Sundays, going to church, then going home, and then investing every minute and every hour for the next 6.5 days imbibing on the world, giving ourselves to our business, or to leisure, virtually doing nothing more for the Kingdom than just sitting in the pews Sunday morning, hardly leads to the life abundant.

*"Only one life and soon it will pass; only what's done for Christ will last."*

People matter, and that's always the big challenge, isn't it? 'Pastor, I can't deal with that person, they drive me up a wall. I find that person so off-putting, so obnoxious, so insufferable. I just can't be the instrument of choice to help that person along.' That's what you say, but what does God say? Have you talked to the Lord about it?

Not too long ago I had a man to my house every Friday morning; I cooked him breakfast and disciplined him, going verse by verse through the book of Romans. I did the same thing with my step son, Billie's son Marty Moore.

Many years ago, when I was a student at Asbury University, our ministerial club would hook up with Campus Crusades for Christ, and there in Lexington I did it for months, but on a certain

cold February evening there were so few of us that I opted to go alone. So, setting out on foot I found my way into the big student center. It looked like a huge lounge, and as I remember it, it seemed to be the size of four gymnasiums. There wasn't a soul in there, but then I spotted this one student.

As I approached, I could tell he was young, I was a senior and he was a freshman. He had hair down to his shoulders, (it was 1969) he wore a jean jacket and a pair of jeans. I walked over to him and said, "Pardon me, my name is Ed Bonniwell, and I am working with Campus Crusade for Christ, I happen to be a pre-ministerial student and we're seeking to find students and talk with them about Jesus. May I talk with you?" He was sort of slouched down on the couch but he sat up. He said, "Yes, I would like that." Then I saw a pensiveness in his face which is still with me after all those decades. Then he said this, "I would love to talk with you, I am so very lonely here." It melted me. I remembered saying, "Well, let's become friends." We chit-chatted for a few minutes and I shared the Gospel. He said "Yes, I want to receive Jesus." We stayed pretty close for the next year and a half. But of course I graduated and moved on; he was aware of it. He really was transformed. One little obedience can put in motion a life being claimed for Christ.

Paul wanted to live and render more fruitful service to the Philippians. Now beloved, we all have responsibilities, jobs, and employers, with an array of things competing for our attention – projects at home, children and grandchildren with needs; but, and of course we have an understanding God, some days we're like a child's spinning top. What is that old Amish saying? "The faster I'm going, the more behind I'm getting." Well, that happens. But I think the wonderful insight and big truth here is to remember to save something of ourselves for Kingdom work.

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## THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(7)

### LOWLINESS OF MIND – A PREREQUISITE FOR CHURCH UNITY

*“... But in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”*

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

3/11/24

Philippians 2:1-4

Tonight, we pick our study up with vs. 27 and 29 in Philippians chapter 1.

There’s a true story that sort of gathers up much of what I’ve been saying thus far. And it captures Paul’s intent, or what he was really about. The story is centered in George Whitfield, the great influential evangelist of the first great awakening. When Whitfield got out of college at Oxford, (and remember he was a part of that Holy Club with John Wesley, Samuel Wesley, and himself) Whitfield was asked to preach in a certain church the Sunday following his graduation. One of his biographers said he preached to about 200 people. That Sunday he announced that he would preach on the street corner right outside the church that evening at 5 p.m. 5,000 people came without any organization at all. From then on, all he did was say where he would preach, and 10, 20, 30,000 people would show up.

Whitfield exemplified Paul’s preoccupation with the name of Christ over his own name. As both Whitfield and Wesley experienced tremendous success, Whitfield decided to hand the reigns of leadership of the Methodist movement over to John Wesley. Wesley seemed to have a genius for organization. And because those following these men were called Methodists, and because the Episcopal Church became closed to them, Wesley began to create societies. Because their movement was in danger of being divided over allegiances to either Whitfield or Wesley, Whitfield decided to hand the reigns of leadership over to Wesley.

Whitfield followers urged him to take back his position of leadership. They even warned him that his name would be forgotten. His followers didn’t want that to happen, Whitfield itinerated in America, and brought Christ to all of the 13 colonies. Tangentially, let me inform you that when he spoke in Philadelphia, the crowds exceeded over 30,000; one of his big supporters, financial supporters, was Ben Franklin. Mr. Franklin wasn’t a good boy most of the time, but he was enthralled with Whitfield, and captivated by how he preached Christ. Franklin never made a commitment as far as we know, but his admiration and love for Whitfield was something he wrote about extensively.

Nevertheless, Whitfield’s followers were afraid he would be forgotten; that his name would be removed from the ecclesiastical history of the people called Methodist, and here is how he replied ... “My name? Let the name of Whitfield perish, if only the name of Christ be glorified.” Oh beloved, that’s why Whitfield had such an extraordinary anointing. That’s why when he

preached, he moved Heaven and earth. That's why he could fill stadiums before there ever were stadiums; and he never had any organization. This was a man all about Christ. Beloved, the singular passion of a faithful Christian minister is to make much of the name of Christ. John the Baptist was content to let his name and influence decrease because his joy was bound up with increasing the fame of Jesus Christ. (John 3:30) This was Paul's heart. He wanted to remain and go on ministering, because that would strengthen them in their love for Jesus.

Finally, let's note verses 27-29, and we'll do so in a cursory way. Notice in vs. 27, Paul gives the Philippians an imperative. Let your conduct or behavior be worthy of the Gospel of Christ. How do we do that? By living honorably, by living above reproach, by doing nothing underhandedly, by loving a life that becomes the Gospel, avoiding back-biting and slander. By not being duplicitous or hypocritical. Let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel. In other words, behave as citizens worthy of the Gospel. The word worthy signifies something that fits with the weight and the worth of its standard of reference.

By the way, Paul in Ephesians 4:1 speaks of living worthy of the Christian calling of the Lord. Colossians 1:10, speaks of walking "worthy of the Lord ... being fruitful in every good work ..." I Thessalonians 2:12, "... walk worthy of God who calls you into His Kingdom and glory." The measuring rod is the Gospel, the Gospel is the gold standard for the Christian life, and therefore its worth and weight govern the Christian life.

The point of this is best summed up by a noted theologian, who by the way mentored the late James Montgomery Boice; Dr. D.A. Carson says with respect to this verse, "Conduct worthy of the Gospel is above all conduct that promotes the Gospel." Paul's burden is that whether he's able to get to them, or has to remain apart from them for a while, that he would have no reason to be ashamed, and that they would be standing fast in one spirit, that is the Holy Spirit, and they would have one mind, that is unity, striving together for the faith (message) of the Gospel.

Now in vs. 28, and this could easily make for a complete sermon as something unique is conveyed here. Let me read the verse. He speaks of not being frightened in anything by your opponents, or not in any way terrified by your adversaries; and he says that when that kind of confidence is put on display, it is to them a proof of perdition because it signifies they're enemies of God and will be destroyed and eternally lost.

This is a thought that seems misplaced in this epistle of joy; but really it isn't. In times of opposition, for a believer to abide faithful, reveling and delighting in the confident hope of Jesus Christ, then he has an anchor that will hold. God promises to be the able advocate of the believer. Beloved, we have received a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, and it's Jesus Christ that makes us sufficient for the warfare that comes to us almost daily. When we trust, rather than fall to fear, when adversaries mount their offensive, Paul says it's a clear sign to them that they're on the wrong side; indeed, it is a sign of their destruction, and it's an evidence that you are in possession of a great salvation, now there's a basis for joy, namely a faith that holds up and doesn't crumble when opposition comes.

1. When opposition comes, its bark is worse than what it can bite.
2. When opposition comes, don't see it as being bigger than what it is, or tell yourself you're a grasshopper in your sight.
3. When opposition comes, they are clueless as to the power of God and how He will be your advocate.
4. When opposition comes, remember God already sees them as being defeated.  
Sennacherib passed the fortified cities and bottled-up Jerusalem. He settled in for a big siege; God sent 1 angel and 185,000 Syrians were found dead in the sand, Sennacherib went home and entered into his Temple to worship his god and get answers; and his sons assassinated him.
5. Moreover, when opposition comes, put no confidence in your own flesh and remind yourself you have an anchor that will hold. The contrary currents that come at you will not be forever, and better yet they are bound up in God's purposes.
6. When opposition comes, remember there are great treasures to be found in our trials.  
Ask, 'What are you trying to teach me Lord?' The sooner we learn the lesson the better off we are.
7. When opposition comes, though our enemies seem utterly fearless, remember their real warfare is not with us, but with God. In Psalm 2 when the nations came to war against God coming from Heaven, he laughed at them and held them in derision. Pagans are stupid and clueless about what they're up against; but when they tangle with us, they're tangling with God. David said, "I've never seen the Lord's righteous forsaken."
8. Finally, when the enemy comes, he generally has a vaulted view of his own strength, and a strategy for prevailing; but he has no counterplan for supernatural power that may be wielded against him.

Most of the time when opposition comes and we abide faithful as Paul tells us in Philippians 1:28, we must immediately remember that the battle is not ours, and that our business in that moment is to trust Christ implicitly. He is our able advocate, He is a saving defense to his anointed, He is our dread warrior, He is our rear guard, he is our shield and buckler, and a present help in a time of trouble. We must remember in such a moment that our joy and confidence in Christ, throws the enemy off of his game, gets into his head, and is utterly unnerving.



Vs. 29 is something that's easy to lose sight of, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." We get to believe on Christ, minister in His name, experience His interventions, see the signs and wonders, all of the prayers that were over-answered, but we also get to suffer for His sake. That doesn't sound like fun, but it does mean that we are squarely in the Kingdom. Spiritual opposition means that we are a threat to the principalities and the powers; and when we don't run away, and we stand firm in the midst of demonic opposition, both men and devils, and all who oppose Christ are brought up short. Paul says, I'm your model here; indeed, he was.

As we noted in our study of the first missionary journey a few weeks ago on Sunday morning in Acts 13, as Paul tried to present the Gospel to the young Proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a Jew named Barjesus, a false prophet called Elymas, which means Magi, opposed Paul with demonic force, seeking to hinder the Gospel, keeping the Proconsul from believing on Jesus. Paul was undaunted. He never met a demon that he liked, and he stood tall and rebuked this man. Then Paul asked God to strike him with temporary blindness, and that is exactly what happened. It completely arrested the Proconsul, and the Word says he was astonished by what he witnessed, and even more astonished by the teaching of the Gospel, and of course he believed and was saved.

In addition to these two distinctive emphases, namely to consider the gift of our days as opportunities for more fruitful work in the Kingdom, and to stand strong in our faith when we face opposition; Paul now begins to focus on the great theme of humility. Here is what we're going to see: Humility is foundational and axiomatic for the maintenance of Kingdom life. Without humility, the body life of Christ is compromised and in the main our testimony can be destroyed. As we will see in this study, humility in Hellenistic culture and the Roman culture was not considered a virtue, but a gross weakness. What follows is a strong teaching on this great theme.

I can think of no other teaching by the Apostle Paul that is so counter cultural. I've had people argue with me that the way of humility is the path of a fool. 'The world loves a winner' they say; the person that can outmaneuver and overpower others. But those are worldly values, and they do not carry the approbation of Heaven. Therefore, we're going to strengthen our grip on understanding Biblical humility, and we're going to see the necessity of it, if indeed the Church is to be an extension of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Here's a basis for real rejoicing. Namely that in Christ we are more than conquerors, and thanks be unto God through Jesus Christ who gives us the victory. The world can certainly strike out, punish us, and persecute us; but the absence of fear, and standing tall, trusting our Savior in the moment of extremity, often wins the day; and it puts demons to flight.

Beloved, you have an anointing wherein you can do just that. Promise me you'll think about it. Amen.

As we begin Philippians 2, especially verses 1-4, we see what Paul coveted for the church, namely their unity with one another. He had already stated back in chapter 1:27, “only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, (and by conduct, he meant behavior) so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear that your affairs are in order”, (meaning that your business, your body life, the ministry of the church is unfolding to the glory of God) and that you have great unity, i.e. “standing fast in one spirit”. Again, Philippians 1:27 “with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.”

Here in chapter 2:1-4 he is amplifying this concern. Therefore, he says in Philippians 2:1, “if there is any consolation or encouragement in Christ”. It goes on to say that if you’re going to find encouragement and comfort, it comes out of loving one another, and good fellowship that ennoble; and if you’re going to have affection for one another and offer each other mercy, then it’s going to require like-mindedness, being in one accord and like in mind. John says in his epistle, “my little children let us love one another.” Every one of us as believers has experienced encouragement, exhortation, comfort, and heartwarming love from Jesus Christ, and that is supposed to change our orientation towards one another. That makes us high-minded and selfless, preferring one another in love.

When the church comes together it should be a love feast. All should be made to feel welcome. All should be rejoiced over by others, because we have the same Savior and we’ve all experienced the same grace. Paul says that when the church behaves like this, it made his joy complete. (Philippians 2:2) He says when the church is like-minded, and that doesn’t mean that everyone agrees on everything, but the principle of love is what knits us together. If Paul had to observe today the modern church and see the factionalism that’s taking place because of all things political, I believe he would lay face down in the street and weep for our salvation.

Right before Covid hit in our last meeting place, over at Receptions, a man walked in one Sunday morning, small framed, well dressed in a coat and tie, but with a set jaw and a scowl on his face. He came up to me and said, “Are you the Pastor?”, and he did it in a gruff way. I smiled, said, “Yes sir I am.”, and said, “Welcome”. Lifting his finger up in my face he said, “I have one question, is this a democratic church, or is this a republican church? I answered, and how could I ever forget what I said, “That doesn’t matter here. This is a ministry that calls people to know Christ deeply.” He then responded, “That’s all I need to know.”, and out the door he went.

Isn’t that sad? All it takes is one person who says this is where I am politically and everybody else better be on my page. Beloved, in Christ we are to transcend all our political concerns, meaning that they must be subordinated to Jesus Christ and the work of the Kingdom. We need to be like-minded, knowing that our Savior’s worthy of worship. Like-minded in evangelistic zeal; like-minded in believing God over-answers prayer; like-minded knowing that we are to bear one another’s burdens; like-minded in knowing that if we lose our life for His sake, we will find it. Show me a church where there’s like-mindedness like this, and I will show you a church where the Holy Spirit is moving, and a church where God will do great things.

By the way, in the Greek here the word translated like-minded is also rendered ‘attitude’. Believers are to have a good attitude, an attitude that is rooted in selfless love, an attitude that is informed by Jesus Christ and the love that He has for us. Paul also wanted the church to have the same love that Jesus has for His church. Again, Philippians 2:2, “Having the same love”, the same love that Jesus has for His church ... “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her.” Jesus prayed in His great intercessory prayer in John 17 for all future believers ... that they may be one; one in their love and passion for Him.

Now saints can we really talk? Let’s just come down from the Heavenlies, lest you think Pastor Ed has fallen into a great pot of sanctimony. We hold this treasure in earthen, earthly vessels, we’re all a part of the ‘clay pot connection’. We are saved but we are flawed, because we are cracked pots. Beloved, there’s an amazing array of pots in the Lord’s kitchen.

Given 55 years of ministry it’s hard for me to get too glassy eyed about unity and oneness. In church people can get very territorial about space, the women’s auxiliary guild can get at cross purposes over missions and projects; divisions can occur between trustees as to what project can come first. The finance committee with their spreadsheets can often see that the so-called impending vision of the church is fantasy. There are a thousand ways people can get divided. But a church is a family, and we’re supposed to bear with one another, and not quit on one another, cop an attitude or declare war on someone. When people get out of line they need to be told. But most often, and now I’m going to meddle, someone gets in our face and they are completely bent, and they’re accusing and cultivating discord; we know they’re out of phase and we say nothing ... ‘Well, it’s just not my place. I don’t want to get embroiled in that conflict.’ Before you know it, it takes center place in the body life of the church.

We have a proclivity to get so inwardly focused, and there’s no greater illustration of this than that horrible day in 1917 when the Bolshevik Revolution broke out on the streets of Leningrad. On that very day, right there, the entire Russian Orthodox Church was holding a great conclave as the church was in a crisis; unable to achieve unity on the color of the vestments.

People will disagree, but the people who disagree and who say, if this doesn’t change, I’m leaving, then let them go. God expects His people to love serving Him, be educable, and be willing to bear with one another. Paul loved the Philippian church because he knew this struggle was there, but they handled it so well.

What I’ve shared so far is the first part of this positive exhortation. But now it gets down to specifics; the negative part of this exhortation, “Let nothing be done out of selfish ambition or conceit.”; or lying. In other words, in the church, don’t seek to selfishly advance yourself. Promoting things that will advantage your own position. But rather (Philippians 2:3) “... in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” In other words, prefer others above yourself. Never allow yourself to look down on others. Notice that phrase “lowliness of mind”, the idea here is of humility that goes very low. It’s a humility that goes out of its way, that will be utterly selfless that will go to the bottom as it were so that others can be blessed ... he says esteem others better than yourself. It shouldn’t matter to us who is preeminent and who

gets the applause. By the way, the word ‘humble’ in the Greek, *tapeinoo*, is striking because it was frequently used in ancient times in reference to slaves and their loss of prestige or status.

Being humble doesn’t mean that we should put ourselves down running around telling others how unworthy we are and how bad we are at everything, refusing to acknowledge any good in ourselves. That type of thing is not the meaning of humility. Humility is getting out of the way when you don’t have to. Humility is stepping back so that another can step forward because we sense that they need affirmation. Humility is going low so that others can stand taller. Lowliness of mind is needed in the modern church today.

I’m thinking of the person who’s always running around and saying, ‘I’m on fire for God, I’m on fire for God’. Fires always burn out. I don’t even know where that saying came from. The Bible doesn’t tell us anywhere to be ‘on fire for God’. It does tell us to love the Lord, and serve Him with gladness and joy. In a similar way, there are those who feel the need to tell others they’re humble, as in, ‘I’m being humble right now’, or ‘I’m humbling myself’; it’s not something we need to say, it’s something we need to do. Humility is something others should say about us. Humility says, I will go low so Christ can go high. To have lowliness of mind is to have humility, and humility is best evidenced when we can, “esteem others better than ourselves”. The ESV renders it, “In humility count others more significant than yourselves”. Humility is stepping back so that the significance of others can be put on display. There’s no greater example of humility in the New Testament than when John the Baptist said, “I must decrease, but He must increase.”

Most of us don’t have any problems increasing, but it’s the decreasing part. Humility, beloved, is helping others to look very good. Humility is seeing others get good press, and then rejoicing in it. Moreover, humility is never in play when we use power, influence, or our preeminence to get something we want; whether it’s in church or anywhere else; especially if it brings harm to others. Humility is always void of manipulation.

Someone called me the other night and we had a great conversation about how we sort of move up, and apparently my friend had been told, “You need to make friends with a certain person. You need to network. You have to stay on the right side of people in positions of power.” I suspect you do in the world; and that takes a certain political prowess. I never had any. I played by a different set of rules. i.e., “let your yay be yay and your nay be nay”, and, “everything that you do, do for the glory of God”. Promote Christ and not yourself, and best of all, in terms of worrying about moving up, simply to trust God’s Word that says promotion is from the Lord. It seems to me the best alternative for an abundant happy life is putting your trust for your future in Christ, and not in one’s own political prowess. In other words, play your life to God and He’ll put you where you’re supposed to be, and then be peaceful in it. I believe the humble person isn’t concerned to manipulate the circumstances to their advantage, but rather they’re willing to allow God to advantage their lives simply because they love and honor Him. When this type of humility is indicative of saints, it mitigates against one-upmanship, it allows us to stand on high ground. This type of humility carries the approbation of Heaven, and it produces a clearing ground so that the Holy Spirit can really work. Isn’t it amazing just how

multilayered, potent and heavy-laden one text can be in which we mine out the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ?

Then what follows in vs. 4 is right in line with what has been said, “let each of you look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interest of others.” The word translated ‘look out’ here from the Greek is *skopein*, used by Paul to regard as your aim. Each believer should take pains not to be completely absorbed in their own concerns, but should be intentionally on the lookout, i.e. in a state of readiness to find the good points and qualities in others; and to point them out.

This is a good cure for conceit and ambition. When you think about living otherwise, then remembering that the goal of the Christian life is knowing Christ, it should bring us up short. By the way, Paul says something similar to this in Romans 15:1, 3, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.” How easy it is to make ourselves the center and circumference of all things. It’s what we want. But blessed is the man who can stop and count to ten in every circumstance and ask what God wants. I think the overall idea here is to be the kind of Christian who wants God’s very best and finest for Christ’s Church, and who will never forget that his brothers and sisters, like himself, were also bought with a price, being redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Which means we are to value one another, and to love one another from the heart.

Philippians 2:1-4 are front loaded verses – the depths of meaning here are almost unfathomable, but clearly Paul is enjoining upon the Philippians a kind of corporate body life in which they would find great joy, but which also would show the world a connectivism that brings life and light and deep joy. God is trying to move all of us to that place where the only thing that really matters is, “Christ in you the hope of glory”.

I’ve had a number of Youth Pastors over the decades, and I’ve always felt proprietary about them. Indeed, I was generous and always concerned to give them a full experience of ministry, including Sunday morning preaching. I’d like to believe that most had a good start under me, but there was one who turned me inside out. He was a rich kid from the West coast and there was no pleasing him, but he was more than happy to share every critical thought that crossed his mind.

I will not go into all the details except to say that his fundamental problem was that he did not have a shepherd’s heart. I believe his parents called him into ministry. He was admittedly a Hollywood hunk, but the reason his ministry could not get traction is that he lacked genuine humility. He respected no one, always unctuated in a self-pleasing way. If he felt like upbraiding me, he did so with an attitude that seemed to say, ‘Now what are you going to do?’

Unfortunately, it all ended badly for him. He used up every credit he had and when the boom was lowered it was inescapable. To my knowledge, he drifted off somewhere else, but I’m pretty sure he was long gone within 5 years. Beloved, it’s still true, James 4:6 says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” The lack of humility in his life led to conduct that was self-serving and not Christ-honoring. He would not come under anyone’s authority. Despite the fact that he may have blamed everyone for his demise, it was God that took him out of Christian

ministry. A lack of humility will shut down even the most abundant life. You and I are called to live on our knees, to walk in lowliness of heart and life. What do we have that we have not received? What can we really boast in? Absolutely nothing.

Take a few moments and ask God to help you get an objective look as to how others experience you. Are you warm, kind, predisposed towards others with a loving attitude? Do others see you as a bondservant of Jesus Christ?

Right now, I'm thinking of some businessmen I know that almost with a sense of pride will say, 'I know I'm difficult, and I'm not very humble.' To say that means that one is walking on thin ice. If you have real struggle in this area of your life, take it to the cross ... before God has to take you to the woodshed!

Here ends the lesson.

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## THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(8)

### *SOUL NOURISHING REFLECTIONS ON THE KENOSIS PASSAGE*

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

3/18/24

Philippians 2:5-11

Before us tonight is perhaps one of the most heady theological statements in the New Testament. It’s very easy, especially for theologians, to give great detail on everything that is said here; and for good reason, because it accentuates one of the greatest moments that ever occurred in the cosmos. Frankly, I can think of no other event that would be its equal in scripture, other than the creation itself. But perhaps this passage is even greater because it reveals what the creator actually did. It’s entirely possible to be very faithful in expositing these passages forgetting the big reason as to why it was shared.

Remember Paul here is talking about humility, and he enjoins upon the Philippian believers a certain mindset and calls them to lowliness of mind, manifesting genuine humility, esteeming others better than themselves. In Philippians chapter 2:1-4 this is the big, big theme. Paul here makes a strong case that without humility, unity and oneness is hard to achieve, indeed impossible to achieve. We said last time that this phrase, lowliness of mind, bespeaks of the kind of humility that will go very low, it’s a kind of humility that will go out of its way, indeed that will go to the bottom so that others may go to the top. This is what it means to esteem others better than ourselves.

By the way, humble in the Greek is rather striking because it was used in ancient times to refer to slaves, and/or their loss of prestige or status. Humility is getting out of the way when you don’t have to. Humility is stepping back so that another can step forward. Humility is going low so that others can stand taller. Doing that with gladness of heart is the kind of humility God wants to find expression in us. True Biblical humility stands back so the significance of others can be put on display. Humility is a willingness to decrease in terms of our own life so that Kingdom purposes can go forward. Humility is never in play when we use power and influence or prominence to get what we want. Humility is always void of manipulation. The proud man networks and uses relationships to get to the top, the humble man does everything for the glory of God, and daily reminds himself that promotion is from the Lord. Humble people look out for the interests of others. Humility is supposed to be indicative of all true Christians, who are ready to help, lay down their agendas and be a blessing to others. More importantly, humility is giving up all rights to ourselves, and this is exactly the whole purpose of the Kenosis passage as it points us to the ultimate act of humility – Christ had equality with God, but He did not count it as something to be grasped, He gave it up ... He “emptied Himself”, and in the incarnation took on the fashion of a man and became obedient to the cross. This is the ultimate act of humility and that is the point of the passage.

Secondarily it reveals a great deal to us in terms of Christology, the doctrine of Christ. Therefore, I want us to settle down and go verse by verse through this great passage.

In vs. 6 Paul says that before His incarnation, Jesus Christ was in the form of God, and was God. The JB Phillips translation of this verse reads as follows: “Let Christ Jesus be your example as to what your attitude should be, for He, who had always been God by nature, did not claim by His prerogatives as God’s equal.” Therefore, who is Jesus Christ? Christ has equality with God, and He shared that before creation, which speaks to His pre-existence, and this passage also reveals that Christ was reigning with God and as God from before the world was ‘wasing’! (Please forgive the bad grammar.)

We live in a day when many will acknowledge Christ’s existence. Many say that He is the ultimate example of what humanity can be; He’s spoken of as a great religious teacher, and those things are true, but by themselves they are misleading. Jesus Christ did exist. He was a teacher, but if that is all that can be said about Him, then that represents a very inadequate understanding from the standpoint of scripture. The only way to see Christ for who He truly is, is to catch a glimpse of Him coexisting with God the Father from all eternity. John tells us clearly that Christ did exist before the beginning even began. We read in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and that Word became flesh”, and the one who became flesh was none other than the one who existed with God, and was God from the beginning. In Colossians 1:15 we see the eternality of Jesus Christ, for there Paul speaks of Christ who is the image of the invisible God. The writer of Hebrews plays the same chord in Hebrews 1:1-3, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; <sup>3</sup> who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”; taken together these passages teach that Jesus Christ cannot be understood on the basis of His earthly life alone. He was indeed a man, but He was also God.

But now moving on through this unique passage, here in Philippians 2:6, we run into two more words that deserve very close attention. The first is the Greek word for our English word ‘form’. The word is *morphe* ... being in the form, or *morphe* of God. In English, the word ‘form’ is generally associated with the outward shape of an object, and it certainly has that meaning in the Bible. Even in English there is another meaning that is attached to this. Let me illustrate it this way. Sometimes we ask, ‘Are you in good ‘form’ today?’ When used in this way it points to an inward condition that may not be detected on the surface. The point is that both of these meanings are gathered up in this Greek word *morphe*, and both of these meanings apply when this word is used in reference to Jesus. He is, “in the form of God.”, this means that Jesus Christ possessed inwardly, and displayed outwardly, the very nature or essence of God.

A second word that occurs here in Philippians 2:6 in speaking of Jesus Christ is the word, ‘equal’. In the Greek it is *isos*. This word is used in our time as a scientific term, isomer, and isomorph, isometric, and we also find it in the phrase, isosceles triangle. An isomer is a chemical molecule having a slightly different structure from another molecule, but being identical with it in terms of its chemical elements and weight. Isomorph means having the same form. Isometric means, ‘an equal measure’, and an isosceles triangle is one with two equal sides. Therefore,



when you put this all together as stated in Philippians 2:6, the word *isos* teaches that Jesus Christ in every way is completely and perfectly God's equal.

These two phrases put together (*morphe*, and *isos*) readily reveal the lesser confessions that we find in various places regarding Christ's deity. Many will readily admit that God is divine at least in the sense that all men are divine. Men in fact will call Christ the Son of God, in the sense that we are all sons of God. The late theologian Paul Tillich spoke of Christ's "Permanent unity with God" in the sense that we all should attain such unity. But this is not the teaching of scripture. When Christians speak of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, they're not speaking about any such divinity, rather they are speaking of the eternal and unique Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they maintain that He existed eternally as the second person of the Godhead, and as such was equal with God the Father. Now listen to this very carefully, everything that God Almighty is to us, so also is the Lord Jesus Christ to us. That should be true of you, for this is the teaching of the Bible. I have often said it like this, and it conveys the same theological truth, namely "If you run past Jesus to find God, you will miss both of them, because Jesus Christ is everything that God has to say to man." If Jesus Christ is everything that God has to say to man, then Jesus Christ is *isos*, that is, equal to God in every way.

I'll never forget one Sunday morning, and this was years ago at the Mariemont Community Church. I had preached a message based on this very passage. Afterwards, in the back, a woman visitor made a point of telling me she was an Episcopalian, she said with cocked head, "Well, this was different today Reverend. You see at our church we talk mostly about God and not Jesus, because Jesus is not at the same level with the Father." Then she said this, and I've never forgotten it, "God is fully God, but Jesus' God-ness is not exactly the same as God's God-ness, and that's why we direct most of our prayers to God and not Jesus." Honestly it almost made me tear-up because she didn't get a thing out of my teaching.

This passage is teaching that Jesus is equal to God in His nature, character, being, essence, image, power, knowledge, and His knowingness; thus, Jesus could say ... "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." And, "If you know me, then you know the Father, for I and my Father are one." And by the way, the eternality of Jesus is seen in our Lord's great intercessory prayer John 17:4, 5, where our Lord says, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

That doesn't need any explanation, but I want to give some. This verse is telling us that Jesus possessed a glory before the incarnation, and this glory was God's glory – that's a second thing, and then thirdly, He did not have it after the incarnation, but be careful here because while He gave up the glory, He did not 'empty' Himself of deity, but only of some prerogatives; there is absolutely no wiggle room here. Regarding the prerogatives that He gave up, we might say that in His human nature His information was accurate and trustworthy, but there were still certain things that He did not know, as evidenced in Acts 1 when He was asked if He would restore the Kingdom of God to Israel, and He admitted that only the Father knew that. This is one of the ways that He allowed His humanity to limit certain prerogatives that He shared with the Father in Glory.

We're going to see that in many charismatic expressions of Christianity, and in many churches that promote those expressions, leadership and the Pastors will teach that in Jesus' earthly ministry, "not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped" meant He emptied Himself as a deity and ministered here as a man only in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then, on the cross, He took back His deity, which enabled Him to present a once and for all, full, sufficient, and perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

That's very slick stuff, but it is theological error, and worst of all, is a damning heresy. Jesus Christ did not empty Himself of His deity, but only of His prerogatives, that's what He laid aside in the incarnation. But the fact that Jesus would even do that represents the ultimate expression of genuine humility. He was equal with God, yet set aside His prerogatives, came to this earth and became obedient to God, even to death on the cross. And why did He do that? Obviously, it revealed the nature of true humility but He came out of love "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son". Do you ever stop to think just how beautiful the entire Christian story really is? As E. Stanely Jones once said, "If there isn't a God like Jesus, then there ought to be one, because that's the highest form of love."

Some think Christianity is a made-up religion and the 'Christ idea' was formulated by men, then you are in a pitiful condition. In Greek mythology that pantheon of gods were made up by men, and when men create gods, listen carefully, they always impute into those gods their own carnalities; and thus, the gods they create are as petty as those who made them, which explains why in Greek and Roman mythology we find the gods being jealous and vengeful and mean-spirited, fighting one another, victimizing people on earth, gods that are capable of unprecedented cruelties, gods that are not righteous or have any of the attributes that characterize the God of the Bible. No one could have made up a God like ours.

As Isaiah says, "There is no God likened unto our God", He is matchless in perfection, "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity", He is complete perfection without sin, perfectly righteous, He is transcendent above everything; and yet, He's imminent, God in our stuff and struggles. As someone has said, "He's in the details, and He's in the fine print". This God is understanding, full of grace and mercy, there is forgiveness with God.

The whole point of His condescension as to why He did "not count equality with God a thing to be grasped", and gave up His prerogatives, and came among us, is to lift us up from the mud and mire of this world, to save us from the corruptions and all the toxic carnalities that lead to eternal death. Did not Jesus say, "He who finds me finds life", and, "All who hate me love death." I know of no passage in the whole Bible that so comprehensively and succinctly tells us the truth about Jesus, and yet as rich and as forthright as this passage is, it points to His humility.

Years ago, I found myself very attracted to Jack Hayford, and he was the Pastor of Church on the Way out in sunny California. It was a mega church many times over. When my daughter first went to California, she joined that church and got deeply involved. Tangentially, my secretary shared a story related to Jack Hayford. Someone gave her a tape of Jack Hayford preaching on "Enlarging Your Tent". The Word preached inspired faith to believe, as she was going through a tough time of infertility. This lady that had given her the tape, and another lady

in the office, (a Christian Ministry) surrounded her and prayed; she was healed and two weeks later became pregnant with twin boys. (No medical treatments were involved.) In further years, she was blessed with two single girls.

Jack Hayford is with the four-square denomination, he became their leading theologian, and oddly enough both he and R.C. Sproul became very good friends. Imagine going to an R.C. Sproul conference, remembering that Ligonier Ministries represents the citadel of Calvinistic faith, and there in the lineup is Jack Hayford. Jack Hayford was an extremely capable theologian; I've used his Study Bible for years. If ever there was a beautiful soul it was Jack Hayford.

So, one year I'm at Ligonier and Mr. Hayford is speaking. Here's what some people don't know, when he got out of seminary he took a small church of 75 people out in the wilds of Indiana. He pulled out all the stops, preached Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday nights, and he worked with the youth, (he was so young himself) and it was the kind of church where clerical George did it all and where everyone else evaluated him. Well, the fault finders and the nit pickers were there and after 3 years, said Hayford, he was completely wiped out, bone tired, fatigued at a level from which he couldn't recover. But the pain of it all was greatly accentuated because he had managed to grow the church from 75 people down to 50. He actually called that congregation, and the experience of the saints there every Sunday morning, "A curmudgeon fest". He said the bickering and the complaining, all the belligerency and toxicity that came with it was so poisonous that no matter what he did not a new soul came.

All his friends said to hang in there and pray. He was afraid that he would get so busy losing his life for their sake only to get up 5 years later and have 25 in worship with even more unhappiness. In great brokenness late one night in that little country church, he told the Father he was defeated and he had to leave. He left and he was not sure it was even the will of God for him, but all of it was so unhealthy and oppressive, and he wound up taking a small church in an old 1950s building, a church called, Church On The Way. There weren't many churches to choose from because his denomination was very small; as I said, the Four-Square Denomination.

Well, he was gun shy, didn't know what to expect. He wrote down on paper all the mistakes he thought he had made, but now he's looking at another small church, provincial, and where Pastors have come and gone; he didn't have anything new to bring to the table. But he decided what he would do and not do, and he concluded that if he truly preached, the Gospel God would raise up people to do the work of ministry.

Beloved, what happened is utterly inexplicable, people started coming in not 50 at a time but 250 at a time, and Hayford had such parochial hateful leadership that when the church hit 2,000, he fired all of the leaders, took control of the church, called in the denomination, and no matter what went down church attendance kept going up, up, up. Now he's standing there sharing this at a Ligonier convention and he was addressing the issue and the need for humility in pastors. And then he shared this, he was asked, "Mr. Hayford, in the name of genuine humility, as you stand before about 26,000 people every weekend, would you give it up, go back to Indiana and take a congregation of 50-75 people out there in 'St. Swithens and a swamp's nest'? Would you

give up what you have in the name of humility, humble yourself and go back to those beginnings?” As he related the story, he looked at the man and said, “No”. Then he bowed his head and wept. Beloved, humility isn’t a subject that is for lightweights.

You think about that! Amen.

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## THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(9)

### VIEWS OF THE ATONEMENT- THEN AND NOW

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

3/25/24

Philippians 2:5-10

Text:

#### **Philippians 2:8 (NKJV)**

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.”

#### **II Corinthians 5:21 (KJV)**

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Last week we dealt with what is called the Kenosis Passage which refers to ‘self-emptying’, and sometimes it’s called the great parabola of scripture. The passage pictures the descent of Jesus Christ from the highest position in the universe, down to His death on the cross, and it carries the mind of the reader back up to see Christ seated once again at the right hand of the Father. The whole passage is used to illustrate what true humility really is, and that if Christ was not willing to count equality a thing to be grasped, but humbled Himself, then we should also be willing to humble ourselves. Indeed, Christ, according to Philippians 1:8, humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on the cross. The cross is the central feature of the New Testament. Indeed, the cross of Christ is the central theme of the Christian faith.

We believe that there on the cross Jesus Christ became our sin substitute. In other words, He took our place; that’s what we deserved, but He died a vicarious death on our behalf. On the cross He took our Hell and our sin, and the wrath of God that we deserved, and all the reproach of that death unto Himself; so that believing on Him and that finished work, we are brought into saving faith. He was the sin bearer in other words, He died to remove sin, and we would say that is as ‘clear as a bell’. I Peter 2:24 says of Christ, “Who in His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness.” We get that. In some ways that’s old hat. We’re glad for it, it’s a part of the old, old story; from our current perspective as evangelical Bible believing Christians, we know this. But in the history of the Church beloved ... now listen and hear this very carefully, there were times in the early centuries of Christianity wherein the work of Jesus on the cross wasn’t all that clear, and various views of the cross began to emerge.

I want us to take some time tonight and look at some of the theories of the cross that saints have believed in the yesteryears of Christendom.

1. One such view is the **Ransom to Satan Theory**. It was put forth by an early church father by the name of Origen (AD 185 -254) who was an early theologian from

Alexandria, Egypt. Later he ministered in Caesarea; and he was the leading proponent of this view. Because of his great influence, others who came after him began to propagate his understanding of the cross.

What he taught was this, namely that the ransom Christ paid to redeem us was paid to Satan ... in other words, Christ's death was a ransom payment because all people by virtue of sin are in the devil's kingdom, or domain. These were the early days of the Christian faith, and such doctrines were still being extrapolated from scripture. This Ransom to Satan Theory finds no direct confirmation in scripture, and in the history of the Church, had few supporters. I think that happened because of the restraining and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. This was a view that said Satan, rather than God, was the one who required a payment for sin. Because all of us once were Satan's captives, Satan had to be paid off in order for us to secure a release. Therefore, on the cross, the blood of Christ shed was the means by which we were purchased from Satan in a legal transaction.

Of course, the whole thing was based on a terrible theological error. You see the assumption of Origin's theory was that we belonged to Satan; however, by creation we are children of God, and not children of the devil. We were created by God and for God; and when Adam fell, God abrogated the covenant of works and brought forth the covenant of redemption, and made the basis of our justification faith in Him, in God the Father, and God the Son.

Worse, this Ransom to Satan Theory ascribes all authority to Satan, which he does not have, Satan does not own humanity. To the contrary, he seeks to destroy humanity. Satan has no power to demand from God what he wants. This theory ... this 'Ransom to Satan Theory' presupposes that Satan set the terms, saying to God, I will only give up those provided you pay me with the blood of your Son. Satan has no power to dictate those kinds of terms. Beloved, nowhere in the scriptures are we told that as sinners we owe anything to Satan. Our sin is always against God and His divine majesty, and not to the devil. The truth is, Jesus Christ was not paying a ransom to Satan, but rather with His own blood, He was satisfying the just demands of a Holy God.

This Ransom to Satan Theory got a slight foothold, and traction to some degree, but it was not embraced by the greater Church in the early years of Christendom.

2. Secondly, another view of the cross emerged in the Church called the '**Moral Influence Theory**'. It was advocated by Peter Abelard, a French theologian who lived in the Middle Ages. (1049 – 1142) This theory is scandalous, given our understanding of the cross today.

The Moral Influence Theory held that God did not require any payment for the penalty of sin, but rather Christ's death was simply a way for God to show how much He loved

human beings by identifying with their sufferings, even to the point of God's Son Jesus Christ dying on a cross. Therefore, Christ's death was really a great teaching example that shows us just how far God's love for us will go. I know of no scriptures that would explain the cross in that way; to the contrary, the scriptures bear witness to Christ as a sin substitute ... "He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The Bible tells us that "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us" ... died in our place. Therefore, to simply look at the cross as an expression of God's great love and nothing more is superficial, and it is a gross denial of the work of Christ. Now as strange as this sounds this particular view of the cross cut a swath in Christendom, and in the early medieval Church there were many who understood the atonement in that way.

3. The third theory that sort of got in the limelight of the history of Christendom, was called ... **'The Accident Theory'**. In this view the cross was something unforeseen in the life of Jesus. It presupposes that Calvary was not in the plan of God for His Son; therefore, Christ's death was an unfortunate accident; it was unforeseen and unexpected. Well, this is heretical and easily corrected. In Peter's great sermon on the day of Pentecost, he spoke of Jesus as, "delivered up by the determinate council (definite plan) and foreknowledge of God." Beloved the cross was no accident. Jesus was conscious all the time of His forthcoming death. He foretold it time and again. In Matthew 16 we have such an example.

Well, The Accident Theory was a kind of a one hit wonder. It got on stage and sang to the Church, but the applause was short, and its tenure was marked by a distinctive brevity. This theory lasted about as long as the teenage idols of the late 1950s.

4. Then, there is **The Martyr Theory of the Atonement**. This theory postulated that Christ's death was similar in kind to that of John Hus, or Polycarp, or any other noble man who had given up his life as a sacrifice for a principle, or a truth of the Gospel. People, believers, became martyrs because they would not give up their faith or compromise what they believe. Christ however, was not martyred or killed for His faith, rather He died as a sin substitute, and rose again to reveal the essence of true saving faith. Martyrs like Stephen did not die for the sins of others. Stephen died in faithfulness to Christ. The idea that Christ died a Martyr's death really elicits nothing from the cross other than He was true to Himself. But nothing renewing or supernatural flows from that idea, hence it is false because it misrepresents our Lord's extraordinary work at Calvary.
5. Next, we have **'The Example Theory'** of the cross. It was taught by a man named Faustus Socinus. (1539-1640) This man was an Italian theologian who settled in Poland in 1578 and he did in fact attract a very wide following. His example theory denied that God's justice required payment for sin, rather he taught that Christ's death simply provides us with an 'example' (and that's the key word) of how we should also trust and obey God, even if that trust and obedience leads to a horrible death. Whereas the Moral

Influence Theory says that Christ's death teaches us how much God loves us, The Example Theory says that Christ's death teaches us how we should live.

He tied his theory to an erring view of I Peter 2:21 ... "For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps." Christ was an example for us in His death, but He was more than that. Galatians 1:4 says the Lord Jesus Christ was the one who gave Himself for our sins that He might rescue us from the present evil age. You know saints, Satan is a master at distorting and twisting the Word of God. If he can't get people to deny it outrightly, then he appeals to the intellect to have us believe something erringly. Truth held in error never leads to real peace with God, or a redemptive, robust, victorious walk with Jesus Christ. This theory, The Example Theory, while being a kind of happy thought, happily did not endure, and never really caught on.

6. Then finally, there is what is called '**The Governmental Theory of the Atonement**'. It was put forward by a Dutch theologian by the name of Hugo Grotius. (1583 – 1645) The Protestant Reformation was on, and the Magisterial Reformers like Luther, Calvin, and *Melanchthon*, had by that time passed away. Europe was beginning to see the rise of The Great Puritan Divines. Over in England there had been a tremendous persecution of protestants because Henry VIII's daughter Mary through Katherine of Aragon, had come to the throne and was determined to restore England back to its heady days of Roman Catholicism. Mary came to the throne and began to persecute everyone; but then she passed from this life and Queen Elizabeth, who was the child of Anne Boleyn, came to the throne and ended all persecution.

About that time Grotius began to promote this theory, 'The Governmental Theory of the Atonement', that held that God did not actually have to require payment for sin, but being an omnipotent, all-powerful God, He could have set aside the requirement and simply forgiven sins without the payment of a penalty. To which we would then ask, what then was the purpose of Christ's death? Here's his answer – it was God's demonstration of the fact that His laws had been broken, and that He is a moral law-giver, a governor of the universe, and that kind of penalty would be required whenever His laws were broken; thus, Christ did not exactly pay the penalty for the sins of any people, but simply to show that when God's laws are broken there must be some penalty paid. So, Christ's death then was a sign to all of humanity that God had been sinned against and His laws broken, and that's what Jesus was signifying in His death. Calvary was a sign of God's governance.

It's really kind of convoluted, and in terms of how it helps an unregenerate man, it certainly eludes me. In other words, to this theory, Calvary was nothing more than God saying to the world, to humanity – this had to happen so that you might know your true condition; but there was nothing there that happened, according to this 'Governmental Theory of the Atonement', that would have helped someone come into saving faith. In short, 'The Governmental Theory of the Atonement' was simply God's way of making an



announcement; but God had been violated by the behaviors of men, so hopefully men would try and do better.

I know it sounds strange, but these theories were out there, and the Church struggled to correctly apprehend the work of the cross. Ultimately the Church came out in the right place. Now you may laugh at this, but I'm going to give you an assignment; if you have any non-Christian friends, call them up and simply say, 'Our Pastor has given us an assignment. Tell me off the top of your head, what is the value of the cross? How do you understand it?' I suspect the answers you will get will be similar to, and in conformity to some of these theories that I have mentioned.

Harkening back to Philippians 2:8 we read that, "being found in the fashion of a man, Christ humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even to death on the cross." There He bore the sins of the world and died in our place. He died to satisfy divine wrath. He died to reveal God's love. Indeed, He took our place. He took our punishment so that our God "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" could see us through the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to us, made possible by the finished work of Christ. In our day nothing seems plainer from scriptures; but that was not always the case. I am so thankful for the Holy Spirit and His preservation of the great truths of the Gospel.

Here ends the lesson.

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## **THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**

(10)

### **WHAT DO YOU MEAN WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION?**

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

4/8/24

Philippians 2:12-18

The captivating verse, given these 7 verses, is verse 12, where Paul admonishes the Philippians to, “work out their own salvation with fear and trembling”. If ever there’s been a misunderstood verse, then beloved it’s this. Let’s get a firm grip on what it’s not saying. First, it is not saying that we are responsible for our own salvation. This so-called problem text does not support the idea of a ‘self-help’ salvation. This verse does not say, work for your salvation, or work toward your salvation, or work at your salvation. To the contrary, it says work out your salvation. No one can work his salvation out unless God has already worked it in – are you listening? This verse, listen carefully, presupposes, and this is clearly what Paul is saying to believers ... being already saved because the Holy Spirit has entered into your life, then you have His power at work within you; therefore, you are now to strive to express the salvation that you have in your conduct.

Our conduct is to be evidenced in a public way. Notice Paul says in vs. 15 that we are to be “children of God, without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” It is the public expression of our Holy Christian Faith that is the working out of our salvation, which is seen by others. Clearly this is what is in view.

Dr. James Montgomery Boice wonderfully illustrates this; presupposing a kind of straw man who hears the Gospel preached and dutifully responds to it, yet before he believed he was filled with misconceptions about God and himself, he had problems that he could not solve, he had wrong patterns of behavior, (as we all once did in our BC days) he was doing many things that were against the will of God; then, after he believes, these things are usually exactly the same. He still has the same problems, the same misconceptions, and worse, even the same sins, sometimes even the same doubts; but it now begins to dawn on him that many of these things must change. He now has the Holy Spirit within his heart, and as he responds to the work of the Holy Spirit within, he begins to see that the salvation he already has must now express itself in public action, and that his salvation must be evidenced publicly and distinctively in his conduct.

By the way, there is a clear parallel between Philippians 2:12-15, and the 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Deuteronomy. The words, ‘children’ and ‘blameless’, and the phrase, ‘a crooked and perverse generation’ in Philippians 2:15 is also in Deuteronomy 32:4, 5; and the context is illuminating. The parallel shows that Paul was thinking of Deuteronomy as he wrote to the Philippians. The people of Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the hand of God. God had brought them out of Egypt in spite of the fact that there was nothing in them to commend them to God. They were not mighty; they were not wise. They were not more numerous than any other people. But God loved them, and that was the sole reason for God’s deliverance. God loved them and called them. If the people had had their way, they would have stayed in Egypt even though they were slaves. Admittedly, terrible hardships were in front of them. In fact, even after they were

delivered there were times when they wanted to go back; but God led them out and He did not change His mind. He had chosen them; He had led them in the wilderness; in effect, He had trained them for 40 years, and now they were again at the Jordan River, and they were about to go into the land. Moses knew by this time that he was not to be allowed to enter into the promised land, but before he was taken up to Mt. Nebo, he wished to give a charge to the people to remind them of their past deliverance and their future obligations. Moses led them through the wilderness and was with them even then. On this basis he now argues that they are to possess the land and to live there as God's obedient children.

This is why Paul has this chapter in mind. Paul was about to be taken out of this world himself, as Moses was. He did not know whether he would be killed immediately or whether he would be delivered for a short time, but he knew that this would probably be his last charge to his beloved friends at Philippi. What was he to say? What should he tell them? Giving thought to the matter, I believe that he began to see that the situation of the Philippians was similar to that of the Israelites and his own plight like that of Moses. They had been dead in their sins and loved it. They would have stayed in their sins had God not called them to Himself. But God had called them, and Paul began to teach them the Christian way of life. Because of this – because of this deliverance, these Philippian believers were now to “work out” the salvation that God had so miraculously worked within them. The idea is that what has been done in a person by way of God's saving activity, must be responded to and lived out; and it is in the conforming of our outward conduct to the inward reality of our new birth that we are in fact “working out our salvation with fear and trembling”. This is what Paul has in mind in verse 12.

Another thought. Because we are to work out the salvation that God has worked into us, we must ever keep in mind that it is God in us through the Holy Spirit who does the working. Again, Paul writes in vs. 12, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”, but no sooner does this phrase roll off his lips that he adds vs. 14, “for it is God who worketh in you both to will and do of His own good pleasure”. Don't miss this, it is God who does the working. God's working begins with our wills, for the verse says that God works in us “to will” and then “to do ... of His own good pleasure. Note the order, willing always comes before doing.

I do not have time to review Luther's tract on the bondage of the will, or Jonathan Edwards' treatise on the freedom of the will, but far be it from any of you to ever argue that you have complete free will. Oh yes, you can use your free will tomorrow morning deciding on your breakfast, pancakes and eggs, eggs and grits, oatmeal, cereal, Raisin Bran ... just a big pile of fruit. How about what you wear? You have free will to choose, but I will now prove to you that your will is still in bondage to sin, even though you are in Christ. Right now, decide that in the next 24 hours you will not sin, and beloved you will, in thought, word, or deed; however, in Christ, our will has been renewed, and we do not willingly want to sin, or grieve the Holy Spirit; and if we do, then we have “an advocate with the Father”, Jesus Christ the righteous. Daily we surrender our will to the Father's will, and we want all that we do to be subordinated to the work of Christ within us. Here's the point, and don't lose it, God is the one who does the working in us, and His working begins with our wills. I speak of the sanctified will, namely an orientation within, born of the Holy Spirit that causes us to yearn for God to do all of His good pleasure.

Then thirdly, notice this text speaks of God as the one who works. He worked in us in the new birth, and now He works through us that our lives may be conformed to His heart and give public evidence of that. Now it is in the working out of our salvation that the rubber meets the road. This is where we discover ourselves as Christians who struggle. As God works in us conforming us inwardly to His great saving work, the outward expression of that can prove to be a struggle, i.e. overcoming old habits, pushing past our unforgiveness, recognizing our own emotional baggage and damage, giving up our old biases and prejudices, or saying yes to a Kingdom mindset and forsaking those behaviors that are antithetical to the great heart of Christ.

I meet Christians all the time that are bitter and angry stone throwers, cynical. You know the Bible says we are to lift up Holy hands for all who lead, and I know believers who will not do that. They will not lift up Holy hands for anyone who is not in their party. But why not? Beloved, here's an Ed Bonniwell conviction, you don't have to buy into it, but for me it's set in stone: it's not what happens in the White House that's going to affect this nation, but it's what happens in the steeple house. As goes the church, so goes the nation. Only believers who have escaped the bondage of their own carnalities, and who can recognize them for what they are and take those things to the cross are truly able to live a life that becomes the Gospel of Christ.

You realize that you can become a Christian, remain a complete mess for 30-40 years and then die in the same condition? The sanctifying work of Christ working out in our conduct the saving grace He's worked within us ... is something we can say no to, or we can surrender to it. If you do, so many of your Christian friends won't understand, because so few Christians are truly willing to say in their lives, "not my will but thy will be done." So, when you stand back and read Philippians 2:12ff, there is a sense in which Paul is saying give evidence of your faith, show off this glorious work within this saving faith by allowing it to find public expression.

One of the ways that this is manifested is given to us in vs. 14. "Do all things without complaining and disputing." Really? How easy it is to read right past that. That's not very deep or profound theologically speaking. I don't know about you, but if I let myself go I could easily become 'the Cincinnati curmudgeon'. In fact, this winter I thought about a series of articles I would post on Facebook called 'The Cincinnati Curmudgeon'; kind of like Andy Rooney of 60 Minutes; remember him? I would start with things that were hermetically sealed.

Recently I had to pick up a prescription, and frankly I've had it with how things are sealed these days; so, I looked at it and asked "Would you ask the Pharmacist if he would open this for me?" Frankly, it was going to be a bear, and I've almost cut my fingers off trying to get things open. So, the assistant asked the Pharmacist, who rolled his eyes. He couldn't open it. He called in another, and then there was a group of 4 trying to open my meds. There was a dyspepsia turning the air blue. You will have to look up the word dyspepsia. I had a moment of glee. I was told, "This is something we generally do not do."

I bought some mouthwash and had to take a butcher knife to get the wrappings off. I had to use a magnifying glass to read the instructions, and it took 15 minutes to get the top off. I had to do some praying and say, "Oh Holy Spirit do some work here". There are a lot of things where I do a lot of complaining and disputing. The ESV says "Do all things without grumbling or

disputing.” The Greek word for grumbling is a word that sounds like what it means. Its pronunciation is like grumbling or muttering in a low tone of voice. It bespeaks of emoting as a negative reaction to God’s problems or will to one’s circumstances of life. The word for disputing is more intellectual and means criticisms directed negatively towards God.

Now here’s the scandal of the text. When we as believers fall to this, ‘low’ anthropology, (anthropology is the study of the doctrine of man and His depravity) we are in effect directing this venom towards the High King of Heaven. Let me be blunt, your official acrimony is being directed towards God. Stop it! Stop doing that. Someone has said, there’s proof that the Christian life is impossible, to the contrary, it is altogether possible because the Holy Spirit is working within you, and who among us wants our vitriol at life’s hateful vexations to be laid at the feet of our Savior? Something’s telling me that all joy now is eclipsing many a Christian life. But it should not. Praise God for His corrections; and that one is a corker.

Well, you probably could have lived another week without knowing this, but this is what happens when we expound the word verse by verse. I regard this text as an inexpressible treasure; and I’m glad to know it: “Do all things” (vs. 14) on good days and bad days, “without grumbling” and criticizing. You should make up a post card and put this in sight on it. I know you’re thinking of a dozen people that might be helped by this insight but the most important person that might be helped by this is in your own life. I was told years ago, “Preach to yourself and you’ll preach to others”, and that’s what I’m doing. Somehow, we have fallen into some entitlement mentality. If it doesn’t suit us then we have the right to spew out just how unhappy we are. But in effect ... and this is the point of the passage. It’s directed towards God.

I don’t know if I brought this out a few weeks ago or not, but this is from the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Westminster Confession of Faith I believe is the greatest document ever penned in the English language, aside from the King James Version in 1611. Listen to what the great Puritan Divines penned in the Westminster Confession of Faith ... “God, from all eternity did of His own will ordain whatever comes to pass!” This means that closed doors, setbacks, life’s endless vexations, the slights and manipulations of men and devils, or simply life itself, may all seem capricious, but they serve God’s greater purposes; therefore, don’t rail against it. Don’t be like Jacob of old who stood and shook his fist at Heaven and said, “All things are against me.” Remember, God has ordained whatever comes to pass, it’s here and it’s happening, and we deal with it, not by grumbling disputing criticisms, but by accepting it and asking that the Lord would show us His greater purposes in the unfolding of that thing. This is what is clearly in mind. When we behave this way, then (vs. 15) we do this in order to reveal that we may be blameless ... “that you may become blameless and harmless children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

The working out of our salvation, which was sovereignly worked into us, should reveal us as being blameless and harmless to the world; indeed, as the true children of God “without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” The call to be blameless means to live above reproach. It suggests living a life that cannot be criticized because of sin or overt compromise. When we are sober and cautious about our

outward behavior, then we shine like stars in the midst of a dark world. This is made possible moment by moment. (vs. 16) ... “holding fast to the word of life”, which refers to the Gospels and the scripture. Note the phrase in vs. 15, which speaks of shining as a light in the world. In the book of Daniel chapter 12:3, translated by the Greek Septuagint, rendering it ... “of those who shine, as those who hold to my words.” It is noted in Heaven “those who hold strong to God’s Word.” Paul upon hearing that the Philippians were doing that very thing, found himself greatly rejoicing. (vs. 16) ... “That I may rejoice in the day of Christ.”

Close your Bibles. When I was teaching this lesson, a dear old friend, Todd Fishasher, called in from Florida. He mentioned the first time we met, which was right after I led a worship service on a beautiful day at the Mariemont Community Church 1983. Todd, by his own admission was a mess. He was trying to find a church and a Pastor wherein he could marry his bride. He didn’t want much to do with religion, and the woman that he loved, he was living with. I reached out to him, we met, and I began to witness.

He pushed back in the counseling sessions, and he shared briefly that in one of our meetings I shoved the Bible towards him and said, “If you don’t repent, you will probably be dead and in Hell in 3 years.” I had no memory of that moment. Usually I’m not that gruff, but at that point Todd was anything but a lovely, adorable, fluff-button.

The Lord Jesus Christ opened his heart. When it happened, he jumped out of his chair and landed in the middle of the floor. It even jolted me. Now he is one beautiful man of God, and he’s walked with the Lord for well over 40 years. His wife was immediately converted. They raised their children in the church, who are now grown with children, and his grandchildren are being taken to church. That moment in Todd’s life put all of that in motion.

Admittedly I’m piecemealing this testimony, but this is what he shared in a cursory way on Monday night April 8<sup>th</sup> in our 7 o’clock Bible Study. God knows how to yank our chain, and walk us out of life’s dark places. He knows how to make us “shine as lights in the world”. This is what Paul wanted for the Philippians. When the God who worked our salvation into us, works that salvation out of us, one of the chief evidences is that our behavior in the world, our conduct, reveals us as belonging to Him who is “the light of the world”.

You think about that! Amen.

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## THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(11)

### WHO ME – POURED OUT LIKE A DRINK OFFERING?

*(This message was taught on Monday night April 15<sup>th</sup>. However, it is now before you in manuscript form, and it was written after the fact. It even has greater clarity than the oral presentation. This message precipitated a lot of discussion, and was incredibly heartfelt. This will minister to your heart. Please read it and share it with others. You will be glad you did. —Pastor Ed)*

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

4/15/24

Philippians 2:17-24

Tonight, in our study of Philippians 2:17-24, I want to address two big issues. First, what does it mean to be poured out like a drink offering; and secondly, how can we honestly assess our own suitability? The passage before us addresses these two matters. Let’s jump in.

In Philippians 2:17 Paul is speaking of himself and says that if in fact he’s being poured out as a drink offering, then it’s done in service to their faith, and that caused him to rejoice. Paul is completely all right with being spent, or used up, if it advances the faith of the Philippians and their love for Christ. By the way, the word for ‘offered’ is ‘poured out’ and it’s a technical word for a certain part of a pagan sacrificial offering. First, a valuable animal would be sacrificed, then fragrant spices poured on it so that when it burned it would create a sweet aroma. Then in the libation offering, the pagan Priest would have taken a cup of wine and poured it out upon the altar. Because the altar was hot, the libation would immediately disappear in a puff of steam and be gone. This is what Paul is referring to, he’s referring to the final offering, it seems there’s nothing else to give or offer. The idea here is that Paul has given his all for the cause of Christ and has held nothing back, and he was doing so in service to the faith of the Philippians. In other words, he was, “losing his life for Christ and His sake.” Of course, that’s not easy to do when you’re still struggling after 20 years to nail down your own church attendance.

We speak of some people having one foot in the Kingdom and one foot in the world. Sadly, first things that ought to be first are not often resolved, even by long tenured saints. There may be a great chasm between what Paul is here modeling for us and where you are. Don’t make peace with it, draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Ask God to work in your heart that Christ may be your all in all. You know it’s time, isn’t it?

The second big thing that is here flows out of Paul’s admiration for Timothy. He raises the issue of suitability for ministry. Can we really talk? In our current evangelical churches’, ministry has been romanticized. Unless you have a ministry with a platform, then you’re not significant in the Kingdom; which is a mindset of far too many. One of the things that we often forget is that God is more concerned for our ‘being’ than our ‘doing’. Not everyone is meant for a more formalized ministry platform. God is more concerned that we have a faithful daily walk

that issues in good conduct and behavior. Indeed, we are to walk worthy of Him. When the agape love of God is in our hearts, it will always move us in the direction of another person's hurt; and that's ministry. Jesus tells us that if we simply offer a cup of cold water in His name, then it is ministry, and duly noted in Heaven.

Again, however, many people are not suited for formalized ministry. It's an interesting observation, but back in the early 70s when I was in seminary, 78% of the student body were planning to be Pastors. Today only 28% of those in seminary plan to be Pastors; and that may very well be a good thing.

Let me tell you the story about Noel. I knew him well; I introduced him to the girl that he ultimately married. He was completely Hollywood, very good looking; theology and Biblical studies came easy for him. We were study partners and went through seminary together, but in terms of his life, everything always fell out in pleasant places. Upon graduation I was sent to Duke University as an Associate and he headed to New England. He sent me pictures of the church and it was beautiful. It was in upper state western New Hampshire. It was a church with an attendance of about 500. He was replacing a man that had been there 15 years. Apparently, someone said the church should take a chance and bring in a young man who could grow and be long tenured.

Noel went to 3 interviews to candidate, and it was pretty much of a unanimous vote. So, he moved in, from the time his feet hit the parsonage floor, he was running 24/7. I will not bore you with the details, but it's right up there with "Nightmare on Elm Street." For 7 days he slept only 4 hours a night. 7 days later, he headed out for an early morning breakfast, and afterwards he called his wife, he said, "Pack your things, say nothing to anyone, drive back home to Kentucky." His wife knew her husband. He called the moving company; it came within 24 hours and packed him. He did not tell one ecclesiastical superior. But when he did, he said to the head of his Presbytery, "This life is not for me."; and he was gone.

The Presbytery huffed and puffed. The church felt betrayed, many felt like they had egg on their face, some members of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee quit the church. Letters were written lest he try to get into the ministry again. They passed letters that went to Presbyteries across the United States; they worked hard to close all the doors to him regarding the United Presbyterian Church of America.

It was a mere 7 days from the time he arrived till his secretive departure; that was all that it took for Noel to discover that even though he was a brilliant student and theologian, ministry was not for him. He called me and told me; I couldn't praise him enough for what he had done. I remember telling him, "Good for you. You spared yourself, the Kingdom, and many churches a lot of pain by being honest and coming to terms early on with the fact that you are not duly called.

Noel was a highly structured man, methodical, he needed order and structure. He simply could not cope with the chaos of too many demands coming at him at once. He and his wife moved back in with his father, a PhD University Professor. Noel entered law school and majored in international law. Upon graduation he began to work in that area. After 5 years he literally



began to make millions. He retired 15 years ago when he was 60 years of age. He owns an estate in the rolling hills among the horse farms of Kentucky. This isn't exactly a story that might cause us to rejoice, and yet blessed is the soul who understands that though they may love Christ, formal ministry isn't for them.

By the way Noel became a faithful church member and taught Sunday school, thereby putting his theological training to good use. Many people try to get into formal ministry for reasons that are less than noble. For whatever the motivation their suitability for ministry may not be there. There is a certain kind of altruism and an ability to go with the flow, and you've heard me say it too often, real ministry never happens in convenient moments. Over the course of 55 years of ministry, getting called out at 8 o'clock in the evening to go to a hospital, then getting up at 6 a.m., and often having to preach 2 services on Sunday mornings; in real ministry nothing is predictable, and all plans are subject to change at any moment.

I had a senior minister in the yesteryears of my life who made it clear to me, and the congregation, that he was not to be disturbed until 1:30 in the afternoon on a daily basis, unless the church burned down. He had been a preeminent ecclesiastic of that denomination, and he was gone in 6 months.

Timothy was a man apparently well suited for ministry, and here's why. Paul had no man so like him, Timothy had Paul's mind in his own mind; thus, he was a man after Paul's own heart. Timothy was duly called, and he understood that his role was to uphold, to display, and promote the glory of God. He cared about people and put them before himself. Paul's understanding of ministry was Timothy's understanding of ministry.

Secondly, Timothy was a man concerned for others, something duly noted. He cared for the flock of God, and he did not seek to rule over the sheep with force and severity, but with gentleness. Moreover, Paul praised Timothy in his concern for Jesus Christ. Conformity to Christ is what a true shepherd wants for His people. Timothy was oriented in that way. You see Timothy was a man of proven character. (vs. 22) As a son with his father, Paul said he served with him in the Gospel. Timothy was not an ecclesiastical strutter, and Paul didn't run around saying, oh by the way this is my Youth Pastor. To the contrary, Paul was proud of Timothy and entrusted him with the flock of God.

Later Timothy became a proficient shepherd of the flock of God, and was often entrusted by Paul to take various assignments throughout the Gentile world. Moreover, Timothy was praised (vs. 22) because he had learned to work with others. Years ago, Rodney Dukes warned me about a particular family. They're very gifted, he said, but if you put them in ministry no one will be able to work with them, and they'll drive everybody off. This couple really pushed for formalized ministry, and I felt desperate. Saints take this to heart; in Christ we're never desperate. So, I made a dumb decision, and I put this couple in formalized ministry. Within 8 months the entire church was in an uproar. They were like a wrecking machine. They simply could not work with anyone. They were not people with a proven character. Timothy was a man with a proven character, meaning what he was outwardly, he was inwardly. He was not the proverbial 'hot dog' giving out subliminal messages like, 'please note how cool and collegiate I

am.’ Do you know why the Bible says do not lay hands suddenly on any man? It is to keep us from putting people into ministry who are not suitable for ministry. Ours is an age where too many Pastors are political animals. The Bible says to let their nay be nay and their yay be yay. A bought and paid for minister is not suitable for ministry. You heard it here! Ours is an age which says that if you have a small church, then you’re a small-time Pastor, and somehow, you’re less significant and not in the same league of big-time Preachers. That is complete nonsense. Formalized ministry issues in faithfulness what God blesses, and being suitable for that task is the fundamental prerequisite for abiding in that ministry.

Some of you don’t know this but I wrote a book on preaching. No one published it, and I have 10 of the finest rejection letters from all the big-name Christian publishers in America. For a while I had each one framed hanging on my wall in my office. However, my book on homiletics is absolutely unique, because I have a chapter in it titled *Understanding Your Suitability for Ministry*. Over the years, when anyone says they have a call to ministry, I make them read that chapter. None of them have ever remained my friend! I’m not kidding. A lot of people who can’t cut it in the world think ‘I’ll get in the ministry, have a big platform, and become a somebody.’ Watch out for that rascal, he might be coming your way.

Now let me speak directly to the tender soul who views himself as only a grunt in the Kingdom, and who has spent years flagellating themselves over the fact that they are not serving the Lord in a way that brings the applause of Heaven. Let me help you to get your mind right. What Jesus Christ wants from you is a daily walk; faithfulness to His Word, and faithfulness to the Church. He wants you to live His life out through you in the marketplace. Whip out your wallet and give somebody \$10 at the grocery store, they need it. Go cut the grass of someone who’s ill. Volunteer for things around the church. Live *coram deo* every day if you keep the agape love of Christ as the centerpiece of your heart, it will naturally walk through the direction of another person’s hurt. As I have said, whatever you do, even if it’s no more than offering a cup of cold water in Christ’s name, you will be ministering, and if you really listen, you will hear Heaven applauding you, big time.

You think about that! Amen.

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**THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**  
**(12)**  
**A SECOND LOOK AT DIVINE HEALING – THROUGH A JAUNDICE EYE, NAMELY**  
**MINE**

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

4/22/24

Philippians 2:19-30

With a title like the one above, you might assume I’m pretty cynical with respect to divine healing. Well, I am not. The God that I serve is the God who, as King David said ... “Yet doeth miracles”. I believe in divine healing, and I will pray for anyone that is sick; but as we will see in tonight’s study, right from the Word of God, divine healing was never a mechanical thing!

Saints, far be it from me to try to pull some kind of rank, but as the old commercial says, “I know a thing or two because I’ve seen a thing or two, and this whole area of divine healing, is subject to lots of charlatans and shysters and Tom-foolery. We seem to live in a church culture where every Tom, Dick, and Bible carrier thinks they have the gift of healing. I know a lady who was very sick and went to a crazy meeting where someone on a platform said that she was healed, and that her lack of faith could cause her to lose her healing. She came home, canceled her doctor appointments, and said, “I don’t need the chemotherapy or the radiation. God has healed me”. She kept her ‘positive confession’ and missed her appointment; within four months the cancer spread everywhere and she died shortly after that.

Some of you know that my precious wife died after a two-year battle with cancer. She got sick on Thursday morning December 5, 2012. Within an hour and a half of being at the hospital, she was diagnosed with a cancer that was very rare. They said she would live four months. She lived 26 months. As I was teaching this message, I played the CD of her testimony. She wanted to live. It was precious. She was not a speaker, but she was really eloquent. Her faith was so centered in Jesus Christ. The amazing thing was that while she was diseased, she was never sick.

She gave a glorious testimony, and she wanted to live. Frankly, when I played it for the class, many were moved to tears. But three weeks later, Faith was translated from the Church Universal to the Church Triumphant. It is true, “God’s ways are past finding out, but ... His ways are good. In this life there are times we have to bow to harsh providences. I was blessed to have had her for 45 years, and it was a glorious marriage.

There were those who often came and said, “I’ve got a word for you”, but when Faith did die, there were people who melted down, and several just disappeared from the Church. God is not a genie in a bottle, and when it comes to healing, we should go slowly.

Let’s get a few things straight. Number one, 1/5 of the Gospels concern themselves with the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. In Luke chapter 9:1-2, Jesus and His disciples are out to share the Gospel, but also to heal the sick. In Exodus chapter 15:26, God declares, “I am the Lord that heals you”.

Secondly, there are many abuses related to divine healing. 1976 courtesy of Ralph Marinacci, when I was a young Associate Pastor at the Pitman United Methodist Church, and I accepted the invitation to speak at a Full Gospel Christian Business Men's Banquet at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel. Yes, that Hotel. Remember what happened there? I do, four weeks after that great night Legionnaire Disease hit, and a lot of people died. Nevertheless, that was a great night in my life, and about 100 people or so came forward when I finished. There were various chapter members doing body ministry, and there was this one man who kept praying that another man would have his ear opened. He kept snapping his fingers, but when healing didn't happen, the man who was doing the ministry began to shame and blame the other man for his lack of faith; he basically told him off and left him alone. How horrible! In my 26-year-old wisdom, I recommended that Ralph Marinacci talk to the man privately, sit him down and never allow him to minister again.

Thirdly, because I've moved in some pretty heavy charismatic circles, I've heard many sermons on authority, and so when people start to heal, they get their big head on, and you hear it in their voice, and they start to command. I have listened to many command God to heal in ways that I would not even talk to my dog forcefully.

I want to tell another story and draw an insight. When I was in seminary back in the 70s, my mother came down with Leukemia in 1974 and died within a 30-day period. I was driving down from Princeton to Newport News to the Riverside Hospital to visit my mother. On one occasion I walked in and three hostile ladies were ministering to her. They said, "Your disease is because of resentments. If we can get these out of you and break these roots, you will be healed." Remember, I was 26, and I wanted to open up the window and toss them out. I admittedly was not the spiritual giant that I am now; I was so offended. Who doesn't have resentments? My mother was a Christian, and those ladies were out to lunch, and they did not have the right to toy with my mother in that way.

Here's a fact. When Adam, in death, passed death to all men, in this world now people get sick and die; the good, the bad, the righteous, and the almost righteous. The important thing is to be in Christ and be prepared for Heaven. When it comes to dying, a lot of people will try to strike a deal, but God doesn't make deals. He wants people to believe on Him now and live for Him now. In these times of ignorance, "God winked at, but now commands all men to be saved". In this day of health, believe on Christ, accept the salvation that He gives, which will turn you into a new creature in Christ Jesus; and live now for His glory and invest the good years that you have before you wind up sick to death.

Anyway, the point is, there's a lot of nonsense connected with divine healing. I'm going to give you permission to see a movie. It's called Leap of Faith, and it was released in 1992; and it's really outstanding. It stars Steve Martin as a charlatan shyster of Faith Healer who comes down to milk people out of their money. The sheriff, played by Liam Neeson, has this evangelist Faith Healer pretty well figured out. However, the evangelist gets too close and develops an affection for a certain family, but he knows their son is not going to be healed. But then the Lord stepped in and authentically healed this kid. The movie depicts it in a powerful way. Then the next scene finds the evangelist with a little suitcase out on a highway in the darkness, trying to

hitchhike a ride with a truck driver as he's running out of town. He's got his suitcase full of money. It's really worth seeing.

Beloved, there is still a lot of money connected to the so-called healing show that's put on by those that drift into town and try to take advantage of those that are quite ill. However, we cannot throw the baby out with the bathwater, healing is all over the Bible. We are told in scripture that if anyone is sick, let them call for the elders who will lay on hands and anoint with oil, and the prayer of faith will save the sick. We should be willing to pray for those that are suffering.

Hezekiah, the great King, became sick unto death and Isaiah said, "Prepare to meet your God". But then the Lord relented and the Prophet was directed back to the King to tell him that he would be healed, and he lived 15 more years. Think of Naaman, the Syrian General, who was a leper. He didn't like it that Elijah said to go to the muddy Jordan and dip yourself seven times. General Naaman thought that was beneath him, but finally he acquiesced, and when he came up out of the water the seventh time, he was healed. How about the woman with the issue of blood in the crowd? She managed to touch the hem of His garment, and she was instantaneously healed, one of the most affectionate names for our Lord and Savior Jesus is the great physician; indeed, He is.

The church is pretty messed up, and pretty divided over this. On the one hand, you have those that are called cessationists who believe that spiritual gifts and divine healing all ceased with the formation of the canon. Others are continuationists. They believe the gifts of the Spirit have never ceased, and that God continues to heal. Beloved, I'm going to put you in the right camp right now: you have no doubt been sick and you got well. Maybe even went to the doctor and got pills, but the fact is you were sick, and you got well, and all healing comes from the Lord, technically you are a continuationist. James Montgomery Boice was 10 years ahead of me in Princeton. We had the same mentor. But he was head and shoulders above me; a genius, and brilliant theologian and thinker. After he got all of his education, he became the editor of Christianity Today Magazine, and after four years, he was called to 10<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church in downtown Philadelphia, which is the host church to the University of Pennsylvania. He was a beautiful man, but he died in 2000, at 61 years of age. He taught that God does not heal, and he was steadfast to his tradition. Meanwhile, Dr. R. C. Sproul was asking people to pray for his buddy Doctor Boice. I hated it that Boice was taken from us so young, but he affirmed the cessationist position.

Let's jump into the scripture, and tonight I want to use what Paul said about Epaphroditus as a springboard for sharing a few powerful insights on divine healing.

Take your Bibles and turn to Philippians chapter 2, beginning with verse 19-30. Paul begins to exult two men as worthy examples as to how to live. Basically, he says to emulate them, be like them; he's talking about Timothy and Epaphroditus. The last time we noted Timothy's suitability for ministry, and all of his credentials and the things that Paul commended him for, so let's hurry on to verse 25. Here we meet a man, Epaphroditus, who had been sent from Philippi with gifts and supplies for the Apostle Paul, who is in a Roman jail. While this man was ministering to Paul's needs, he became sick and we were told that he became sick unto death.

What's that old saying, "no good deed goes unpunished. (vs 25b) Paul commended this great man in three ways. First, he called him "my brother" – there was tremendous affection, and Paul's heart and respect for this man are seen here. He also called him, "my fellow worker". This man worked in the Lord's Vineyard, and had a zeal and a passion for it. Thirdly, Paul referred to Epaphroditus as a fellow soldier. Soldiers end up in hardships and risk their lives. They're up for the warfare, and the battle. They don't go running home to mama. On the first missionary journey, that was Paul's perception of Mark because he bailed on them, but not Epaphroditus; what a soldier.

Nevertheless, this wonderful man became very ill, and indeed was sick unto death. Paul said that had he died on his watch, that he would've had sorrow upon sorrow. Indeed, this beautiful Christian man, Epaphroditus, was distressed when he learned that the Philippians were anguished and praying fervently for him when they learned that he was ill; and that pained his heart even more. Scripture says that this great saint came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life. But it's my opinion that a medal should have been pinned on the chest of Epaphroditus. Without regard for his own well-being, he ministered among those that were sick and diseased putting himself at risk.

But here's the question; during the great revival that occurred in Ephesus with thousands being saved and thousands needing to be healed, Paul used handkerchiefs; he just laid them on people and they were healed; so why did he not whip out one of those handkerchiefs and command Epaphroditus to be healed? Here is why, and take it to heart. Healing now, as then, was never a mechanical thing. God is not at our beck and call. He doesn't heal on the command. He doesn't heal according to our faith, or the faith of the person that is ill. He is sovereign and what He chooses in our lives has been determined eternity past. This requires grown-ups to be at this table.

It's a good thing Epaphroditus wasn't left in the hands of a lot of modern-day congregations. They would've gotten around him, then exhorted and commanded and rebuked and reprov'd, and they would've spent hours trying to get at any roots of bitterness in his life, etc. etc. ad infinitum, ad nauseum.

Here is what we do when someone is ill, we sincerely pray for them. If you popped into Hillside and said you were really sick, I would say to you, "Would you like the Elders in the service to lay hands on you and anoint you with oil and pray, or would you like for me to pray privately with you now or after the service? I believe we should always pray when someone is ill. By the way, can we really talk? You don't have to ... it will. Trust me it will be God's will one way or the other.

Sometimes we need to show a little faith, we should pray for the heart of Christ. I get very perturbed with people who when you ask them to pray for the sick say, 'Well, I've got to pray about praying for the sick and see if that's what God really wants me to do.' All utterly sanctimonious nonsense around the subject, and it can really have a deleterious effect on the body of Christ. Telling people they are healed when they're not; turning healing into a big show is a blasphemy.

By the way, I'm going to add this free of charge, otherwise it would be an additional \$25. Divine healing is not blocked by your lack of faith. God is sovereign. He invites us to trust Him for our healing; but it's always easier to believe that God would do great things for others rather than ourselves. God is sovereign and He's predisposed towards us in grace, and admittedly, He does want us to be in good health and prosper, and as a child would take a broken toy to a father to get it fixed, we too should take our sicknesses and illnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ. However, the text before us reminds us of a great truth; Paul did not whip out his healing handkerchiefs because healing was never mechanical. Epaphroditus was sick almost unto death and could've died while being with Paul, Paul prayed and prayed for him, and rejoiced that God healed him so that Paul would not have sorrow upon sorrow, I get that.

Here's another big issue, often connected with divine healing. When we pray and ask God to heal someone and it doesn't happen, we often feel terrible, as if it's our fault; and believe me they even shame and blame you, or they would shame and blame the one who isn't being healed because of their lack of faith. Absolute utter nonsense. You see it's not your fault. God is the healer. We must not lose sight of that. God invites us to believe that Jesus can indeed heal, but our faltering faith does not block God's divine healing.

Now when we pray with someone who is sick, that's no time to say, 'I don't have the gift of healing', or 'I'm not a faith healer'; but in love and in humility, stand and pray over them general prayer. You don't have to raise your voice to God to act. The Lord is not hard of hearing. God doesn't require a big show with us waving our hands, jumping up and down, or getting holy. I've seen it when it comes to this subject.

Also, know that I'm not condemning wholesale every so-called faith healer. Kathryn Kuhlman was the real deal. I got to be with her a few times at the home of Ralph Marinacci. She was sweet and humble. She was an ordained Baptist minister, and at her meetings, the first thing she would do is whip out her little New Testament and preach an old-fashioned get saved sermon; and she asked people to come and give their life to Christ. Then she would say, let's be in a spirit of prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to begin ministering.

When some of her meetings that were orchestrated in such a way that all things were done decently and in order, she had great joy in the Lord. I admit she was a bit theatrical. By the way, many of her dresses were purchased from May Marinacci, who ran a very exclusive women's dress shop in Pitman, New Jersey for well over 30 years. Mrs. May Marinacci had clients from all over the United States, i.e. Hollywood people, wives of senators and congressman, and people like Kathryn Kuhlman.

I'm going to tell you a little secret. I don't think the gifts ever ceased. There are 19 gifts of the Spirit, I have moved in many of those gifts, and I witness to being Baptized in the Spirit, but I do not minister in healing like a Pentecostal Christian. I took something like a mini sabbatical to travel to Princeton Theological Seminary, and I took a hard look at the gifts of the Spirit and the gifts of healing, and the truth is they never ceased. For centuries, they were often not prominent, but God has never stopped healing, He heals out of mercy. This very night I'm burdened for five or six people that are struggling with cancer and blood disorders, diabetes etc.

etc. My daughter has a serious form of asthma, and for decades I prayed and prayed for God to heal her and help her with it, and He has, but she still has asthma. Someday, of course, we will arrive in the Eternal Kingdom where there's no more sorrow or sickness or pain, and what a wonderful Sabbath that will be. But for our sojourn here on this earth, we're going to get sick. Someone very important to me this very day, he came down with Covid. That nasty stuff is still around and occasionally rears its ugly head. Some people just shy away from the whole business, and I'm talking about Christians, when they get sick, they run to the doctor, but they never stopped to pray and ask the Lord to go before them, or pray that the doctor will mediate in medical wisdom the healing of Jesus Christ, bringing it to our lives. We should do that. Saints I said it previously, all healing comes from God.

There are a lot of books out there on divine healing, and many of them are about a quarter inch deep and a half inch wide, theologically speaking, and they're written by crazy people who have the proclivity of crazy people. Don't be one of them. Don't be duped, you cannot command God; He's not a genie in a bottle. You're not going to snap your hand and God comes running to do your healing biddings. Get over yourself. Also, don't make healing a part of the atonement. If you do, you might get saved and not get healed, and then you would doubt if you were saved.

Here's something else to watch out for, namely those people that will shame people like me for saying the things that I'm saying in this sermon. There's enough here to make everybody mad; however, I'm committed to Biblical faith. I read the scriptures. I see God, that He heals, and I believe that we can pray for the sick, and that we should trust God with the consequences.

I hope and pray you come to your grave at a ripe old age, and that you will never have to deal with terrible sickness and lots of pain. Years ago, I read about the death of C.S. Lewis. It was the most incredible thing I've ever read. I don't think any man ever left this world in such excruciating pain, except Jesus Christ being crucified. Lewis was a Godly and beautiful man, but his death, and all that he went through, makes me shake as I think about it. We never know what a day will bring and checking out of this life could be more than terrible. We need to live close, and we need to love the Lord.

Now, listen to this... We don't have to fake anything He's not doing. I want you to go back and read that again. You might even want to write it down in the flyleaf of your Bible. It would be a good rule of thumb for a lot of people that have significant platforms in ministry. I can tell you a lot of stories where I prayed and people were healed, but then other people were praying too, and to God be all the glory.

I mentioned a while ago, the movie *Leap of Faith* starring Steve Martin as a charlatan shyster faith healer. I do hope you'll watch it, because it also points us to another great truth; it doesn't matter if phonies are promoting healing, because when God wants to heal, He comes and He does so, because God is God, and He is suffering here, and you heard it here. Make sure that you have a prayer list, and make sure that on that list are sick people who need your prayers, and never stop praying for those that are ill. That carries the approval of Heaven.

You think about that! Amen.



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**THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**  
**(13)**  
**COUNTERFEIT CLERGY – HOW DO YOU KNOW?**

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell  
4/29/24

Philippians 3:1-6

At the outset of chapter 2 you recall that we ran into the great Kenosis passage, where Paul pointed to Jesus Christ as a great example of humility. Then he pointed to Timothy and Epaphroditus as worthy men who give us a great example, and who live lives that we should imitate. Then Paul actually points to himself in chapter 3 of Philippians, verse 17 ... “Brethren, join in following my example and note those who walk, as you have us for a pattern.” I wonder how many of us would point others to ourselves and say... ‘Follow my example’. That’s a tall order.

Chapter 3 there is a change in focus. While Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, are positive examples of lives worthy to be emulated, we must keep in mind that not all who claim to know Christ are worthy of imitation. Chapter 3 warns the Philippians against legalistic, false teachers; those who claim to know Christ, but who were teaching contrary doctrines, saying that Gentiles must be circumcised before they could be saved.

Now let’s jump into the exposition.

Philippians 3:1, He says, “Finally my brethren rejoice in the Lord” ... this is not the conclusion of the letter, rather it’s only the halfway point. The word further or furthermore is a much better translation, and preferred. He also says in verse one ... “rejoice in the Lord”, a command which is stated as an imperative, meaning that it is enjoined upon us, a command. What are some of the things that Paul has already pointed out that should be a basis for rejoicing? First of all, the grace of God. We should rejoice in our relationships. In Philippians 1:3, Paul says I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. We should rejoice that God answers prayers. In Philippians chapter 1:4, we should rejoice that we have wonderful Christian fellowship. Philippians 1:5, tells us we should rejoice because the “good work God has started in us will be brought to completion”. In vs. 6, we should rejoice because others have us in their hearts and are praying for us. We should rejoice that God causes our circumstances to serve His eternal purpose. And Paul points to his own experience, Philippians 1:12-15, we should rejoice because for believers, death is great gain. This epistle gives us many things to rejoice in. We should rejoice that we’ve been counted worthy to believe on Christ, and to suffer for His sake. We should rejoice in His great ‘know-so’ salvation that He has worked into us, and is now working out of us.

Notice now Philippians 3:2, he says beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the mutilation, or the mutilators. The dogs here are the legalistic Jewish false teachers, and they are false teachers because they believed that a necessary condition for salvation was not just faith in Christ, but it required circumcision, keeping of the law, and embracing all things Jewish. That makes them evil workers as they were destroying the doctrine of Christ. Justification, being justified before a Holy God with sin forgiven, is rooted in only one thing; faith in Jesus Christ. You see, these legalistic Jewish believers were fundamentally saying that Jesus wasn't enough for real salvation. All cults maintain the same thing, namely that salvation requires Jesus plus things like baptism, or circumcision, or Sabbath keeping ... or whatever it is so that those things become a necessary condition.

We live in an age of seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. What makes false teaching so very terrible is that it is rooted in the demonic. When people sit under false teachers, sadly, they become secluded. Either they become at ease in Zion, their passion for Christ wanes, they fall into a spiritual stupor, Christ becomes increasingly more remote, all passion for evangelism and revival begins to feel alien. Your prayer life falls apart ... this is what happens when you fall to a false prophet, and yet many people will sit in such churches because for generations all their family went to that church, which means that loyalty is rooted in a building and not in the doctrine of Christ. Let me put this on the table, in times of national crisis you will always see a proliferation of false prophets.

Let me interject something, there are basically **Four Types of False Prophets**. Apostates, heretics, deceivers, and suppressors.

1. Apostates are those who've once been in the faith and turned away from it.
2. Heretics never embrace true Christianity, but make up their own religion.
3. Deceivers pervert doctrine, misrepresenting the truth, thereby deceiving one so that they believe the wrong things.
4. Suppressors hold down the truth, like a kid who throws the kitty in the toy box and sits on it when mother is saying, 'Where is the family cat?'. Suppressors, suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Now just as there are four kinds of false prophets, in a similar way there are **Four Kinds of Counterfeit Clergy**.

1. There are those clergy that **merchandize the Gospel**, that is, they peddle the Gospel for profit.
2. Some counterfeit clergy are focused on **distorting the truth**, so that people will believe a lie, and thereby be lost to God's very purposes.
3. Other counterfeit clergy are more dangerous as they are **emissaries of Satan**; and thus, they are active destroyers. They always leave death and destruction in their wake.
4. Other counterfeit clergy are **compromisers**, they will always compromise God's standards and truths for the sake of unity, but most often they compromise to keep their

crowds. They avoid controversy, even if the Kingdom of God, and/or the doctrine of Christ, is at stake.

The false prophets menacing the believers at Philippi were in effect putting confidence in the flesh, i. e. they were adding to their salvation. The message was – you need to do more; simple faith in Christ is not sufficient. I have a dear friend who confronted a mainline Pastor. She raised her children in that church, and then years later, with all of her children lost, and her husband in an adulterous relationship, she went back to see that same Pastor. She herself had become born again, and she said to him, “Pastor Paul, why did you not preach the born-again message?” He answered ... “That’s not sufficient”. Apparently, he said to her that believing on Jesus is too simple, it’s not enough; a mainline Pastor, not indicative of all. That’s what he believed.

Satan uses false teachers to pervert, twist, distort, corrupt, and to falsify God’s truth; lest the image of God be restored in the hearts of men through the saving work of Jesus Christ. Let me say some things about counterfeit teachers, false prophets, or false Pastors ... first, they are not genuinely called, they have the wrong Gospel, that is, self-serving and not Christ honoring. The scandal of the false prophet is that their ideas are rooted in divination. We know this because when they speak and teach, hope in Christ does not spring eternal, rather, they darken the council of others, they flatten God’s truth so that they are clouds without water. They are always marketing prescriptions and formulas. They will not receive a clear revelation, and they often cause people to trust in a lie. Jeremiah 28:15, if you listen to false prophets, they most often speak rebellion against the Lord. True Christianity is based on divine revelation, divine disclosure, but often they are dismissive of that and seek to replace it with their own dreams or visions, or what God has given to them; so that they become the centerpiece for authority.

Take note of the following hard-core criteria for discerning false prophets:

1. False teachers will frequently emphasize experience over the authority of the Word of God.
2. They will often compromise the demands of God’s law in the name of grace.
3. False teachers will often overtly attack historic declarations of sound doctrine.
4. False teachers will not interpret scripture by scripture, but they interpret it according to their own private views.
5. False teachers are often guilty of platforming.
6. False teachers encourage licentiousness in the name of liberty.

7. False teachers are celebrity oriented, it's all about them; they seek the accolades of men and are perfectly okay with the exaltation of their flesh.
8. False teachers promote controversy and they divide people. They are often driven by the need for money, so the Bible becomes a tool for them that they may get people to open their wallets.
9. By nature, false prophets are contrarians. Now watch this, they will never compromise anything that might move them into God's true arena. Take any issue and they will have an opposite view. They are calculating, manipulating, and always seek to make Godliness a thing of profit. They have no concern for the lost. They are showmanship oriented and have a proclivity to court people with money. Often they have a real winsomeness, but they are not burdened to work the Word, or to grow you up in Christ. False prophets are always on the take, and always concerned as to how you can advantage them.
10. False prophets are gimmicky and gimmick oriented; i. e., as in, 'Buy my book, work the formula and God will serve your purposes.' They'll sell healing handkerchiefs or anything else that can raise money for their personal coffers.
11. And know this, beloved, false prophets will never come under the authority of men. Even if they are in a church where there are Elders or a board, they are highly skilled in not being corralled. Ultimately, they despise authority. Now listen carefully, I've taught this for years. If a man will not be under the authority of men, then he is not under the authority of God. False prophets do what they want to do with ministry, not what leadership commands.
12. Moreover, false prophets will not endorse or affirm any authentic work of God. They will exempt themselves from voting on any matter that relates to true Kingdom business. Listen, Satan never compromises his hatred towards the cause of Christ. In 1992 Steve Martin made a movie called *Leap of Faith* about a phony faith healer. He moved into a southern town to put on his Gospel show and rake in the dough. A southern sheriff was on to him however. The evangelist got roped in and too connected to a certain family. A kid that was precious, but badly crippled. Night after night, the evangelist was bringing people forward, and finally this kid came, and the evangelist prayed over him, and God came. In the very next scene, it has this phony counterfeit preacher with a satchel in hand hitchhiking and being picked up by a truck driver. For the counterfeit clergyman, religion is a business, and their philosophy is the management of people for the sake of financial gain. The counterfeit clergyman's motivation is never rooted in the glory of God.

Now next week I want to follow this teaching up with an exposition of II Peter chapter 2, and I want to draw out 14 major insights from that particular chapter.

Time to close. I have a friend who attended a particular church for a long time, and some people at work led him to Christ; he began to grow by leaps and bounds. But even then, he wasn't getting anything from the Sunday morning sermons. Moreover, the program life of the church did not seem to be connected to a Biblical agenda ... no disciple making, no Bible studies, not one program designed to reach the lost. No courses on prayer or any call to prayer. No tract ministry, just lots of activities. He thought that was odd, so he began to talk with this one and that one about his concern. Before he knew it, he was shut down. The more he grew in Christ the more agitated his spirit became. He thought it strange that the church was prospering head over heels while the Gospel was diminishing. It seemed to him that the less Gospel being offered, the church was becoming more prosperous. Then he actually had a sit down and went nose to nose with the Pastor. He could not connect with the minister. There was no common ground. In fact, he was told, "You have connected with some kind of 'funny mentalism'. This church is prospering, and that says it all." So was the church of Laodicea, indeed it was "rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing" – and Christ was on the outside knocking trying to get in. Often when that's the case, the whole thing is being driven by a false teacher.

You think about that! Amen.

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**THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**  
**(14)**  
**COUNTERFEIT CLERGY – HOW DO YOU KNOW?**  
**PART II**

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

5/6/24

Philippians 3:4-11

Tonight, we are returning to this all-important theme of identifying false brethren, false teachers, false prophets. I’m going to bring an exposition from II Peter chapter 2 in just a moment. Understand that in Philippians chapter 2 Paul points to Christ as a great example of humility. Then to Timothy and Epaphroditus as the kind of men we should emulate. Indeed, Paul points to himself (Philippians 3:17) that we might also follow his example, seeking to live out the Christian life. In chapter 3, the tone changes and Paul’s Pastoral heart comes front and center. The “faith once delivered unto the saints” was being threatened by the Judaizers, i.e. those who wanted to add circumcision as a ‘necessary condition’ for salvation. He speaks of them in vs. 2, “beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation.” All 3 references are to these false brethren who were corrupting the faith, as in effect they were attacking the finished work of Christ, denying it’s all sufficiency by adding a churchman work to it; i.e. circumcision.

The church historically has had to contend for the purity of her Gospel, and the sanctity of the salvation message. Both in the Old Testament and New Testament times, continuing in our own day, the church has always been menaced by the brutal destructiveness of false teachings and the purveyors of false doctrines that corrupt our Holy faith.

In order to heighten our discernment, turn to II Peter chapter 2, and we’re going to go verse by verse through this amazing chapter. In vs. 1 note that false prophets will secretly bring in destructive heresies. By heresy I mean doctrines containing some truth, but also are cleverly blended with lies that are straight from the pit; lies which are made believable because of the charisma of the false teacher. Vs. 1 speaks of their destructive heresies. The word destructive in the Greek means to dismantle. When people sit under a false prophet they are slowly dismantled spiritually and emotionally. The fire in their soul is put out. Gradually there’s a loss of spiritual ground, and the great verities of the Holy faith are overturned in one’s life. Under false teachers people go to sleep and lose their passion for Christ. Notice also in vs. 1 that false brethren will even deny the Lord. The Greek word deny, *arneomal*, means to contradict, reject or disavow. Denying Jesus Christ can be done in subtle and slick ways, as in avoiding His name, or a failure to preach the salvation He offers, thereby neglecting to show people the way of Christ more excellently. A good question to ask any teacher is, ‘What do you think of Jesus?’ That answer will expose any potential heresy.

Now note in vs. 3, that such false teachers will exploit their hearers with deceptive words. The Greek word for deceptive means to make merchandise of you. Again, the Greek word

denotes the business of buying and selling. In other words, the false prophet, false brethren will size you up, and if you cannot benefit them. By either giving money or helping them to make it, they move on. They exploit people. They use them as merchandise or as objects to advance their own agenda.

Also, according to I Peter 2:11, they walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness. Often false teachers have a subterranean life, i.e. a secret life. I think of John Wesley Fletcher, a great Holiness Preacher. But then after years of itinerating in Holiness circles, and sleeping around all during that period, we find him cohorting with Jim Baker, organizing sexual liaisons for him in exchange for the good life Baker provided for him. Sometimes it's not that overt. But false teachers walk in the flesh. Their concern is their salary and the church budget, and keeping the money coming in. Their own benefits and privileges are a high priority. They have a proclivity to want more and more. Moreover, in II Peter 2:10, we learn that false teachers despise authority, and they refuse to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Moreover, false teachers will not come under the authority of men. Watch for this – a man cannot be under the authority of God unless he's under the authority of men. Flee those churches where the business of the church is centered on the Pastoral family who are not under a board or accountability. Ultimately that is failsafe for failure.

Also notice in vs. 10 that such false teachers are presumptuous. They are self-willed. The Greek word means insistence upon one's own way. Notice from the text they speak evil of dignitaries. Understand that false prophets are elitists; in demeanor they are arrogant, high minded and condescending; in contrast, true prophets and all true believers, are mandated by scripture to think soberly, and not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. (Romans 12:3) Notice here in II Peter 2:12, such false teachers speak evil of things they do not understand. Because false prophets live in the flesh, they cannot understand the things of the Spirit; thus, they rail against them.

In vs. 14 another devastating accusation is set before us. False teachers have eyes that are full of adultery, false prophets are unregenerate people, i.e. truly unsaved, and they are ruled over by their own passions. Their persona is false, rooted in a learned behavior that mimics a sanctified life. But they are not sanctified as they are not saved. Vs. 14 also tells us that they beguile unstable souls. The word for beguiled in the Greek means to entice, allure, entrap or delude. False teaching takes people captive to influences, ideas and behaviors that lead to spiritual unrest and spiritual death.

Moreover, in vs. 14, and here, note the language, false teachers have a heart trained in covetous practices. Note again that they have a heart trained in covetous practices, there's intentionality here they didn't just fall into this, they were trained by allowing their flesh to be superintended by demons. This is why many live in mansions, wear the finest designer clothes and own various homes, estates, limousines and airplanes.

Here I would like to point to Dr. Jerry Falwell. When he was converted and called to ministry, he secured his training, then began Liberty Baptist Church upon Liberty Mountain in an abandoned Donald Duck Coke factory. Falwell never took a salary from day 1. He came from

an incredibly rich family; yet, despite that he bought his suits from Sears and Roebuck, and JCPenney, drove a pick-up truck, and wore a Dakota watch. He never owned a boat or a set of golf bags, or expensive rifles; he never belonged to a country club. True, he was moved into a mansion by a very wealthy man for his protection, as he had to be guarded 24/7 since he lived under heavy death threats; and this was a great struggle for him. Falwell however, never owned his own home ever after, never held property in other states, or took exotic vacations. He never stopped knocking on doors or doing funerals and weddings. He promoted many young Pastors and singers. He was generous to a fault. His life conformed to his Gospel. He refused to eat in the finest restaurants and he never courted the wealthy. I knew him incredibly well; I never knew a man as Godly or as dedicated.

To him, every person mattered, high or low. Sometimes he would tell his wife, “I’m going to this person’s house tonight for dinner.”, and she would say, “Well, did they invite you?”, he would answer, “No, but they’ll feed me something.” He would often go to the homes of those that were almost less than average people in terms of financial means. They would have him for dinner, he would spend several hours talking and laughing with his coat off, tie pulled down and sleeves rolled up. That’s the Jerry Falwell I knew. He loved his people. Sometimes on those kinds of visits, he would go into their bathroom, or see their Bible on a table, and surreptitiously slip a couple hundred dollars into that Bible, or place it under a bar of soap. Humility characterized his life. His heart was trained in righteousness and not covetous practices, as is indicative of false teachers.

Notice also in vs. 17-18, (and here the language is incredibly picturesque) that false prophets are, “wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest ... speaking great swelling words of emptiness.” False prophets cannot deliver God’s truth. They can only impress by employing earthly wisdom or by using a beautiful vocabulary and fluency of speech, but they are basically windbags and not the voice of the Lord. Also, according to vs. 19, false prophets promise liberty, but are themselves slaves of corruption. Spiritually we will either be dominated by sin or by the Holy Spirit. The false prophet however, void of the spirit, falls to sin; but arranges it in his mind so that it is legitimized.

Finally, you can know false prophets will not preach sound doctrine, sin and compromise are not themes they will address. They play to the crowd rather than preach the glory of God. Their heartfelt purpose is to feather their own nest. They are never Pastoral and they will flee when the wolf comes. They will never serve the prophetic task for fear of losing their crowd. They will not suffer for the cause of Christ, and they have no passion for souls, heart purity, or personal Holiness. In short, they have no theological center. They tend to hold themselves aloof and no one can really get close to them. They make the focus of their gospel this life and what it offers, as opposed to what is eternal and Kingdom oriented.

Now saints let me be clear, true prophets, true teachers, will preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They will gladly be under the authority of their boards, they will preach God, they will not court the wealthy, and will gladly trust their wellbeing to their Elders. If necessary, they will walk in the reproach of Jesus. Every day they will bow the knee to the authority of scripture, and they will live in continual repentance, and they will always know that on their best day, they are



*Simul Justus et Peccator*; saved and sinners at the same time; like everyone else, but hating their sin and warring against it. In their sermons they will be like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. In their ordination, they will live out and teach that they have not been set above anyone or below anyone, but only set aside, and even that by the mercies of God, to preach and teach the Gospel of Christ. True prophets and teachers will hold their calling as a stewardship from God and dispatch their duties no matter who isn't watching!

Now a challenging word, "the Spirit expressly says that in the later times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, (I Timothy 4:1) which will flow out from false brethren as stated in the previous message. False prophets and false teachers proliferate in times of national decay and crisis; the subverting of Christ's Church is Satan's big agenda. A Godly Pastor will want transparency for his own life. He will want a church where nothing is in darkness. He will want nothing unfolding in that ministry that could give offense. He will love the brethren, be a fast forgiver, and will always be willing to be an ambassador of reconciliation to the cause of Jesus Christ. A true shepherd as opposed to a false one, will not be concerned with image or perceptions, but will be a bond servant, willing to lose his life for Christ and His sake.

Charlie Sayers is long gone from this life. He was an affable man who Pastored one of the largest churches in New Jersey back in the 1970s and 80s. He was a United Methodist Pastor and I knew him well. The denomination was pretty liberal, but he had joy and seemed to be loved by the church he served. I was just starting out and newly ordained, but one day at an annual conference in Ocean City, New Jersey, I was passing him in the hall. "Dr. Sayers," I said, "I just wanted to shake your hand. I find you to be inspirational, and you seem to have so much joy. He was a bald-headed chubby set guy and yet nice looking, tell me I said, what would be your Any advice for a guy like myself starting out?" This is what he answered, "Take books of the Bible and preach through them, and let God's perfect work, the sanctifying work that flows from the scripture, work in you; and then it will work in others." I never forgot that. Hence when I read the Bible, I'm always reading it for myself first, not to get a sermon. If a man will wrap himself up in the Word of God, he will never get wrapped up in himself. Rather, he will be wrapped up in Christ, and only then will he be fit for Kingdom business as a true teacher of Jesus Christ.

Now ask yourself, 'Are you sitting under a false teacher, seeing proclivities that are troubling?' If changes will not be made, flee that church, or most assuredly you will be seduced. Stand tall, share your concerns, speak the truth in love. Never forget this, our Christianity must never be centered in a building, but in a community. The true teacher is always concerned for redemptive connectivism, i.e. the fellowship of the saints and their ongoing maturation. He will not try to get into their checkbook, or get himself advantaged by what they have to offer, rather he will love them freely, with only one agenda, to help them love Christ more and more. Willing to lose their life for Christ and His sake above everything else.

Here ends the lesson. You think about that! Amen.

**THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**  
**(15)**  
**BLESSED ASSURANCE JESUS IS MOSTLY MINE?**

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

5/13/24

Philippians 3:4-11

In Chapter 2 Paul pointed to Christ as the ultimate example of true humility, and then pointed to Timothy and Epaphroditus as men worthy of imitation because they laid down their life for the Kingdom; indeed, Epaphroditus almost died. Then Paul pointed to himself as one worthy of imitation. (Philippians 3:17) However, in chapter 3 Paul reveals his Pastoral heart, and warns about those who see circumcision as a necessary condition for salvation. In other words, a ‘Jesus plus’ theology. Paul clearly warns that we should “put no confidence in the flesh”; there’s nothing we can do that can endear us more to God, except faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work. In Philippians 3:4, Paul begins to say that if one could have confidence in their flesh, he would win the prize, because ... (vs. 5) he was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, of the stock of Israel; in other words, he was a Jew by birth, not an Ishmaelite or a convert of Judaism. And when he speaks of the “stock of Israel”, he was declaring he was a member of God’s Holy chosen people. Notice he mentions in vs. 5 he was of the tribe of Benjamin. That tribe, according to Judges 5:14, was considered an aristocratic leader, and the one who gave Israel her first King, which was Saul.

Moreover, (vs. 5) he was “a Hebrew of the Hebrews”, he had great pride in his pedigree. He felt that the Hebrew race had been chosen by God, and he was right of course, but before the Damascus Road he considered his people set apart, and set above; and not set aside to fill the earth with the knowledge of God. Notice also he says there in vs. 5c, “concerning the law of the Pharisees”, this was his tribe, his denominational affiliation. The Pharisees remained orthodox, they believed in God and miracles, whereas the Sadducees were theological rationalists, they had no belief in things like resurrection or miracles, or things of the Old Testament, the Sadducees accepted only the first five books of the Bible. Paul however, felt that he was the true Israel, being a Pharisee. Pharisaism represented the real heart of Israel. And of course he was wrong. Notice in vs. 6, concerning zeal he was an avid and devoted persecutor of the Church. Paul sought to be defined by what he was against. By persecuting believers, he was saying to the world, ‘look how zealous I am for God’s Kingdom’. No wonder he wrote in the book of Romans that there is indeed a zeal that’s not according to knowledge, but then comes the corker in vs. 6b, “concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless”. He actually believed he kept the law perfectly.

That’s what many people believe, ‘I live by the 10 Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and I’m a good person.’ That’s what Paul believed. A man with his credentials,

pedigree, and zeal, his dutifulness in pursuing God, he believed all of that would help to justify him, and he was circumcised. That was Paul's mindset in his old life before the Damascus Road event. I relate to that to some degree, and you do too. In that period in my life before Christ, I was a consummate churchman. I remember being 4 years of age at the Briarfield Manor before church singing on the playground 'Jesus loves me this I know'. I always believed I went to church, I try to be good, sometimes I would even try to read the Bible. Unless of course I bumped into those passages that spoke of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Ammonites, and the Proctor and Gambleites. That's when I checked out.

But for you and for me, and for St. Paul, there came that moment when God hugged us in the dark. (My way of referring to a conversion moment.) On the Damascus Road everything turned around for Paul, and the first consequence of that transformation is that he looked at all that he had previously boasted in and said, "I count it loss for the sake of knowing Christ". (vs. 7 and 8) Look at vs. 8, "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." Paul gladly handed over his religion in exchange for Christ. He handed over his strutting in front of men and God for walking before Jesus in the Gospel in humility.

Look at vs. 9, here we see the yearning heart of Paul as he wanted to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is from the law, but rather righteousness ascertained by putting one's faith in Christ Jesus, note the last phrase of vs. 9 ... the righteousness which is from God by faith. Many people have often said to me, 'Pastor, I can't come to church now, you see I'm not good enough. But I promise you this, I'm going to go home and really work on myself. I'm going to become a good person, and when I get good enough, then I'll come and join all the other good people that are already there.' I wish I could make that up, it's true, and it's been said to me.

Steve Brown, my mentor, founder and host of Key Life Radio Broadcast, is very open about his dad. He was a tender man, but never felt he was good enough for God, and from one Sunday to the next decade he stayed home, trying to become a good person so that he could become good enough to go to church, it was an impenetrable conviction. Finally, on his deathbed his eyes were opened and he believed on Christ. Let me say it loud and clear ... "put no confidence in the flesh". There is nothing you can do to make yourself acceptable to God. There is no program wherein you can make yourself 'gooder' and better. (pardon the grammar) There is a righteousness that is from God, and it becomes ours, a justifying righteousness that makes us acceptable with God when we put our faith in the Lord Jesus.

Now look at vs. 10, and I think this is normative of all who have tasted of the Heavenly gift of salvation when they enter into the new birth. They have this longing vs. 10, "that I may know Him". That word know, *ginosko*, denotes the deepest kind of knowing, as a man might know his wife in a Biblical sense; it is a thorough, complete, comprehensive, knowingness; and God wants to be known. He does not withhold Himself from us. When Paul recovered from the Damascus

Road experience, every moment thereafter he was in pursuit of the knowledge of Christ. He wanted to know Christ and experience the same power that raised Christ from the dead. When you know Christ, you can't get enough. You're sad when church ends. You want to worship. You want to sit under the Word proclaimed. You want the Lordship of Christ reigning over your life supremely. You want everything God can give you, and you receive it with a spirit of meekness and gladness. This is the heart orientation of the redeemed. Whatever suffering comes, you allow it to complete its perfect work, so that we can be conformed by faith. Paul wanted to know Christ deeply, and Paul wanted certainty that he would have life in the afterlife; that he would be raised up with Christ. Beloved, "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ the Lord".

Can we really talk? There are those who do not have certainty. Who do not have assurance of their salvation. I have asked many churchmen over the course of my life, and I'm talking about good devout people, consummate churchmen, "Are you saved?", and I've heard sincere responses like, 'I think so.' 'I'm sure hoping that I am.', but there is a lack of certainty. In I John 5:13 we read, "My little children I write these things unto you that ye may know that you have eternal life." Nothing is more tortuous for Christian people when they lack real assurance of their salvation. John Calvin, one of the great Magisterial Reformers acknowledged that one could have true saving faith and at the same time not have real inward assurance that one belonged to Christ. Even The Westminster Confession of Faith, in question 18 says that believers may sometimes lack assurance. However, the force of scripture is that it's the believer's birthright and privilege to know that they are saved, and that they belong to Christ. To say so is not hubris, or an arrogant boast.

Some of you know that following the heady days of the Protestant Reformation, Luther had so lifted the skirts of Rome, causing the Roman Catholic Church to lose so much credibility, the Council of Trent was called as the Romans had to deal with various corruptions because Luther had them dead to rights. The irony of the Council of Trent was that it went on for nearly 40 years, and many of the corruptions were affirmed, but none were corrected. Consider this; regarding the issue of assurance at the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church affirmed, 'To believe that a believer is pardoned of their sins, is a vain and ungodly confidence, most Roman Catholics will tell you that it's utterly hubris to know that you're saved, and that you can't know until the last day. They say of course that what does help is that you die enveloped in mother church. One of the great theological luminaries at the Council of Trent called the doctrine of assurance, "a prime error of all heretics"; but the plot worsens, they argue that it is presumption to assume one is saved and loved by the Lord, this robs someone of security. At any moment God might change His mind and you won't know why. But didn't Jesus say, "he who comes to me I will in no wise cast out."?

Paul had full assurance of salvation, and he understood that even though he was in Christ, he may struggle with his own flesh, he says in vs. 24, "Oh wretched man that I am". In Ephesians 3:8 he reveals that he thought of himself as less than the least of all the saints. He called himself

“chief of sinners” in I Timothy 13. There’s no such thing as a perfect believer or a sinless saint, yet Paul could say, “henceforth there is laid up for me a crown, and the Lord shall give it to me”. “The Lord will preserve me and I shall never be confounded.” That sounds like assurance to me.

Listen, listen, listen ... listen for all you’re worth, and then listen more intently. Your assurance is not rooted in performance, but in sovereign choice. God chose you, quickened you when you were dead in trespasses and sins, He united you to Jesus Christ, sealed you with the Holy Spirit and wrote your name in the Lamb’s book of Life.

Once as a very young Christian I sat in the office of David Seamands when I was at Asbury University. In that era, those Holiness Wesley Armenian Preachers could preach in a way that made you question your own salvation. I arrived on that campus two months after I’d been saved, but then I’d go to the Altar and get resaved. It was a terrible ‘seesaw’ thing, but finally I sat with Dr. Seamands, and I remember he simply said to me, “Sooner and not later, you need to accept what God has said, that He loves you with an everlasting love”; he prayed with me, and I walked out of that office and never questioned my salvation again. Oh, I heard many strong sermons, ‘You may think you’re a Christian, but If you’ve done this, or had that thought, if you’ve compromised here or there, or did this wrong thing, then you’re not really saved, get to this altar.’ It was like water off a duck’s back. Even in Christ we don’t enter into sinless perfection. Remember Luther’s great maxim that all believers are *Simul Justus et Peccator*, saved and sinners at the same time. But true believers hate their sin and war against it. Beloved, Christ delights to delight in you, in us, and we need to delight in Him.

Again, I turn to John Calvin the great Magisterial Reformer who in a sermon on assurance penned the following:

“Now this kind of hope is not something our own brains or imaginations can devise. It would be foolish and rash of us to think: God will be good to me, because that is what my head tells me! Know what we need is God’s Word which alone gives assurance and in Romans 8 we’re told that once we are in Christ, nothing can separate us from Him, not a dropped ball, a partial obedience some terrible sin some besetting sin or hurtful habit ... nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

If you lack assurance of your salvation, will you now surrender to this wonderful truth, namely having placed your faith in Christ, you are now His, and His forever.

When people lack assurance, invariably their focus goes inward, they become navel gazers, wondering from one day to the next ... ‘am I saved or am I not saved?’ That’s exactly where Satan wants to take you; all wrapped up in oneself. If you don’t think you’re saved, you will not be a good witness. If you don’t think you’re saved and you’re trying hard to be saved, you will produce no lasting joy in your heart. Sooner or later, you will bail on the Lord.

Paul was a saved man who had a radical heart-hunger to go deep with Christ ... (Philippians 3:10) “that I may know Him”, (vs. 11) “that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Paul had full assurance that on the last day he would ever be with the Lord. Paul had this assurance, we already looked at it in the Book of Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” He goes on to say in vs. 23, “For I am hard pressed between two objects, to remain and continue to minister”, because he had a desire to depart and be with Christ, “which is far better”. That my friends is assurance. No one talks like that when they don’t have assurance of their salvation. It’s the believer’s privilege and birthright.

I’m going to go to my grave and think about that old couple, born and raised in a big mainline church ... raised their kids there ... faithfully attended, consummate churchmen, involved in everything. That night back in 2019, there they were, after all those years without any sense of assurance, hoping against hope that on the final day their good deeds would outweigh their bad deeds. I remember how he even said it is presumption to assume that you are saved, you cannot know that prior to death. That poor family had experienced a demonic theft because they were heartily robbed of one of the most comforting truths of the Bible, namely that we can know ourselves accepted in the Beloved, His and His forever.

Do you have assurance of salvation? If not, ask for it. Accept the Father’s acceptance of you. I want you to pray this prayer silently after me.

*Lord Jesus,*

*At times I thought I was saved, and at other times I thought I wasn’t. But now Lord, because of your great mercy, I want to accept your acceptance of me. I thank you that ours is a ‘know so’ salvation. I will never question again whether I belong to you. Truly there is no Savior as sweet, as beautiful, as you, Lord Jesus Christ. And now for this confidence, and certainty, and blessed hope, that I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine, I thank you with all of my heart. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*

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**THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**  
**(16)**  
**BLESSED ASSURANCE JESUS IS MOSTLY MINE?**  
**Part II**

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell  
5/20/24

Philippians

Last time as we looked at Philippians chapter 3:4-11, we noted that obviously Paul had assurance of salvation, in fact, back in chapter 1, he actually said, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Had he not had full assurance of salvation, he might have said, ‘This life I’m living for Christ, and when I die, I’m hoping that will be gain also.’ Beloved, it’s the believer’s birthright and privilege to know that they are saved. I John 5:13, “My little children I write these things unto you that you may know that you have eternal life.” Paul also said that he was hard pressed between two desires, namely to depart and be with Christ, or to remain in the flesh and render more needful service to the Philippians.

In our discussion on assurance, its first cousin emerged related to soteriology – the doctrine of salvation; can a true believer lose their salvation? Before I get into all the theological cul-de-sacs, I want to put the following on the table; as we noted last time, which was focused for us by John Calvin of all people, one can be truly saved, and not have assurance of salvation, and the fastest way to get it is to accept God’s acceptance of you, and trust that your saving faith in Jesus Christ, which was given to you sovereignly in the Spirit’s work of regeneration, is an irreversible act. If your salvation started with Christ, that is, if you did not put yourself in the faith, how can you take yourself out of the faith? In salvation, according to Romans chapter 5:11, you are united to Christ, then sealed with the Holy Spirit (in the book of Ephesians) and your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, and Jesus says, “no one can pluck you out of my hand”. Did not Jesus say in John 10:27, 29, “My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me.” “I give them eternal life; they will never perish.” And, “no one will snatch them out of my hand.” “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” Did you hear that phrase ... “and they will never perish”? The Greek construction here is in the *aorist subjunctive*, and it is especially emphatic, translated more explicitly ... “and they most certainly shall not perish forever.” In John 3:36 we read whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Eternal life is life that lasts forever with God.

When God saves us, He doesn’t run away from us. It’s not as if He says, ‘Now you’re saved, and it’s up to you to keep yourself saved and to stay in the faith.’ You see it is God who perseveres on our behalf ... and now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling ... Moreover, Jesus Christ “sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, where He ever lives to plead our cause.” You and I in Christ are kept by His power. We are given a passion to pursue Christ,

Jesus has said, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me and I give them eternal life, they shall never perish.” (John 10:27) Moreover, God promises that because of the good work He began in us in our salvation, He will bring it to completion, on the day of Jesus Christ, (Philippians 1:6) that is perseverance, but God perseveres on our behalf. Beloved, the only evidence of genuine faith, is a continuing genuine love for Jesus Christ, and when that’s in our hearts, it means Christ is persevering on our behalf.

In Christendom, we have two major theological camps. The Reformed Calvinistic camp, and the Wesley Armenian theological camps. Both camps affirm that assurance of salvation is a believer’s privilege and birthright, and that the Bible teaches we can know that we’re saved; however, for those in the Wesley Armenian camp, their assurance is rooted and founded in a very man-centered approach. Here’s what they would say:

1. We have assurance of eternal life if we submit to Jesus as Lord and sincerely endeavor to obey His commandments continuously. But what happens on those days when you don’t obey? When you’re out of phase or bent? What happens to your assurance then?

I really relate to this. Years and years ago I saw a headline in a small country newspaper, “Your religion can make you crazy.” Early on in my Christian journey, I came into saving faith, but then in my struggles, at times I thought I’d lost my salvation, I’d go to the altar and get resaved, or at least I thought I was. I identified my saving experience as a certain kind of feeling, and when the feeling would leave me, I felt unsaved. Thus, back to the altar I would go, and this went on from 6-8 months, and I became self-absorbed; all the focus was inward. My peace and the joy of my salvation was ebbing away. I got really frightened because I knew enough, that I would never escape my fallen condition, therefore how could I be truly right with God? Oh, the anxiety that hit me when I began to realize this wasn’t working for me.

2. For those in the Wesley Armenian tradition, they have assurance of eternal life if they love the Father and the Son, rather than the world, and if we overcome the influence of the world. Well beloved, we are in the world, and we function in the world, and in fact we are to plunder the Egyptians, namely to take what is good in the world and enjoy it, but who is to decide? ‘I know you love the Father and the Son brother Ed, but I know the world is with you – you play cards, go to movies, or go to a dance.’ The problem with assurance is if we can lose our salvation, which sin does it? I’m completely serious, and if you lose your salvation, because of whatever sin it was, then will God save you again? The idea of being saved and then losing our salvation and getting re-saved, losing our salvation, and getting saved again, hardly makes for the possibility of a robust, satisfying relationship with Jesus Christ.



3. Moreover, for Wesley Armenians, their assurance of salvation is their present possession if habitually and persistently they practice righteousness rather than sin. However, how much is habitually and persistently? Where is the standard, where is the bar? A driven guy like me would want to know. Do you see the problem here?
4. Moreover, our Wesley Armenian friends say that we have assurance of salvation if we love our brothers and sisters; yes but, can we love Mable McClutchbutt? What happens to your eternal life on those days when you'd like to take old Mable out in the church kitchen? There's an amazing array of pots in the Lord's kitchen, and some of those pots are badly cracked. Always loving brothers and sisters as a sign of our assurance of salvation? Are you kidding me? Let's get real. There are believer's we'd rather ignore and avoid; we are not capable of always loving our brothers and sisters.
5. Moreover, we have assurance of eternal salvation, say our Wesleyan brethren, if we are conscious of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within. So, then the issue becomes, 'Do I feel Him; or do I not feel Him?' Some days I feel more ticked than other days, and a lot of times it's not righteous anger. This is a problem.
6. Also, we have assurance of eternal life, say our Wesleyan brothers, if we humbly follow Jesus Christ and live as He lived. What does that mean? Do we grow a beard and get sandals, stop working, walk around teaching and praying, live as He lived? I'm so corrupted I can't even begin to do that!
7. We have assurance of eternal life say our Wesleyan brothers, if we believe, accept, and remain in the Word of life. The greatest saints have written of the, "dark night of the soul". When we can't even read the Word – when such times come, do we forfeit our salvation?
8. We have assurance of eternal life, say those in the Wesley Armenian camp, if we earnestly long for and hope for Christ to return and receive us. But you know beloved, there are many days, truth be known, when we are just in survival mode. Of course we believe in the return of the Lord Jesus, but not every minute. Life can pile us up with lots of preoccupations.

Here's what I'm trying to say - assurance of salvation cannot rest on what we do, i.e. it cannot rest on our performance, dedication, or our spiritual intentional efforts, nor can it rest on some objective mood or thought in our heads that we are special to God because we have decided that we are special to God.

What then does our assurance of salvation rest on? Beloved, it rests on one big thing: true Biblical assurance of salvation rests upon one thing and one thing only – the extraordinary grace of Jesus Christ lavished upon us in justification.

We make too little of the grace of Jesus Christ. In sovereign choice, God chose us in Him to be saved. Moreover, in our justification, we entered into the New Covenant of Christ's blood. Christ shed His blood and redeemed us, i.e. He purchased us unto Himself; that is, He bought us, and now we're owned by Him; we're His property. Beloved, in Christ, God is not sitting in a corner frowning at you. To be in Christ means that God is very fond of you ... that God has brought you into His family, made you a Kingdom subject, He will never leave you or forsake you; you are His and His forevermore.

With that being said, regardless of which camp you are in, and despite the doctrines of these theological camps, for all practical purposes, it seems that some Christians fall away and never return. Did they literally lose their salvation, or could it be that they never really were genuine partakers of true saving faith? There are certain passages that seem to suggest that you can lose your salvation. Let's look at a couple:

#### Hebrews 6:4-6

<sup>4</sup>“For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.”

There the author writes, “For it is impossible in the case of those who have been enlightened, who have tasted the Heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt.”

Is this text describing a person genuinely born again? Beloved, this reference is to those people who have been affiliated closely with the fellowship of the church, and they have had some sorrow for their sin, and they have clearly understood the Gospel in an academic way; being enlightened. In the early church people were catechized, i.e. introduced comprehensively to the faith. They have shared in the Holy Spirit in the sense that they have become associated with the work of the Holy Spirit, and they have been exposed to the true preaching of the Word. This does not mean that they themselves were true partakers of genuine saving faith. They were not the recipients of genuine saving faith. Thus, they've been taught the faith, introduced to the Gospel, have been made to understand the work of the Holy Spirit, but have they entered into

real saving faith, surrendering to the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ? The answer is that possibly they have not.

### **Galatians 5:1-5**

5 “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. <sup>2</sup> Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. <sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. <sup>5</sup> For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

Here Paul speaks of those Christians wanting to embrace circumcision, believing that it is a necessary condition for salvation. Paul says if you do that, then you have fallen away from grace. In this instance the Greek word for severed, or falling away, means to lose your grip on something. These believers were losing their grip on the essence of true saving faith. They were not falling out of grace in the sense of falling out of their salvation, rather they were losing their grip on the true Gospel; thus, distorting it. The warning here is not that you’re going to lose your salvation, but that you are distorting your own salvation.

Time to close. I don’t know why anyone would argue that they could lose their salvation; it is the “pearl of great price”; and if you could use your salvation, what sin causes you to forfeit it? Who would want to turn away from the beautifulness of Jesus Christ, His sweetness, love, and mercy? Moreover, as James says, there’s no such thing as a perfect man. We’re going to drop balls, make mistakes, disappoint the Lord, ourselves, and others; we just can’t turn in a perfect walk with God, day after day. If our assurance of salvation is rooted in our performance, we’ll spend the rest of our life playing a little game called, ‘I think I’m saved, but wait I may not be saved’. God saved you and accepted you, now accept His acceptance of you. God took the initiative and put you in the Holy faith, and that means that He will keep you in the Holy faith. Beloved, we are saved by grace, kept and sustained by grace, and on that final day, delivered to the eternal Kingdom by grace.

Now one little caveat, and it’s a story, so I’ll close with this. It was hotter than blazes, an August wedding at the Mariemont Chapel. That whole church was brought over from England, and it’s really quaint. Down below is a large room where the choir could warm up, the vestry where the vestments were kept, and restrooms. I was down there with the wedding party, the wedding was over, and they had sequestered themselves in the lower level, people were lining the sidewalks to throw the rice as it were when there was a pounding on the door. I opened it, and there was a guy there about my size, maybe about my age, he started in with his accolades, and he was speaking ‘Christianese’. I said to him, “You must really love the Lord, do you have a

home church? “Oh,” he said, “I don’t go to church, I don’t really live for God, but I got the insurance policy.” “How’s that?” “I got the insurance policy, the fire insurance. You see, many years ago I got saved, and once you’re saved, you’re always saved, but I don’t live a Christian life, I’m a pretty carnal fleshly man. I know what you’re thinking Reverend, you’re thinking I’m not saved, oh but I am saved, but I live a very carnal life.”

Beloved, if you know Him, you will live for Him, and the true evidence that God is persevering on your behalf, is that you are living for Christ, and wanting to please Him; yet, knowing that we do that imperfectly, and that God’s advocacy on our behalf never stops. For the person genuinely converted, they hate their sin and have no romance with the old life that once passed away.

People can be deceived about their salvation, which is why some will hear it said, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” But you know Christ, and that’s why you’re here. You’re here right now because Christ is persevering on your behalf. Therefore, let me ask this question, is there anyone here who would say, ‘Pastor, I’ve struggled to have assurance of my salvation, will you pray for me?’

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**THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**  
**(17)**  
**A WORD TO LEEKS AND GARLIC CHRISTIANS**

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

6/3/24

Philippians 3:12-16

Paul began Philippians chapter 3, by calling believers to a singular journey of faith. Specifically, they were challenged to rejoice in the Lord. Indeed, as Paul says in Philippians 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always”; and in a previous study we noted all of the things that we should give thanks for as we walk with the Lord. Then Paul in Philippians 3:2 begins to reveal his pastoral heart, he warns about false brethren, which he calls dogs, who promoted circumcision as a necessary condition for salvation. In effect, it’s putting confidence in the flesh, (vs. 3) and no one had more reason to put confidence in the flesh than the Apostle Paul; in fact, he even provides for us his self-serving resume in which he began to boast in his own pedigree ... “circumcised the 8<sup>th</sup> day, of the stock of Israel. (vs. 5) Of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the law a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. (vs. 6)

Prior to Christ Paul felt that he could keep the law perfectly, as many do in this very hour. ‘Pastor, I don’t know about all that Jesus dying on the cross stuff, but I live by the Sermon on the Mount, and I keep the 10 Commandments.’ Isn’t that sad. For by the law comes the knowledge of sin. Paul acknowledges in another place that he didn’t want to commit certain sins until the law called out those transgressions. In other words, he didn’t want to covet until the law said, you shall not covet. However, when one is in spiritual darkness, they’re stupid, and prior to Christ, Paul thought that he could keep the law perfectly. Of course, the whole point of what he is saying here is that after Christ, all of that was of no consequence. Formerly that was really important, it was gain, it meant something, but then came Christ, and he counted all of that loss and of no consequence for the sake of knowing the Savior.

Then Paul’s deep yearning ... (3:9) was to be found in Christ, “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.” When we speak of our simplicity in Jesus Christ, we are speaking of the way of salvation. ‘It’s too easy’, some say, and that’s true. We don’t have to “go up to Heaven to bring Christ down”, and we don’t have to “go down to hell to bring Christ up”. We don’t have to go through religious orders, enter into a self-improvement class, or even get catechized; we simply believe on Jesus Christ, and if it is accompanied with true repentance and the work of regeneration, we are brought into the eternal Kingdom and wonderfully transformed.

You see Paul’s passion (vs. 10) was to know Christ deeply, and to experience the same power that raised Christ from the dead. Paul yearned continuously to have fellowship with Christ, and

enter into His life. What's remarkable here is that the Damascus Road experience had occurred 30 years earlier, and Paul still has this burning heart, that's the fire that burns and never goes out.

You know beloved, the burning bush that Moses witnessed was a Christophany, an appearance of the preincarnate Christ. (Years ago, I had 4-5 new families that had been visiting for a few weeks, and when they heard that they stomped out of church. "There is no such thing.", they said, "Christ never appeared until He came as the Babe of Bethlehem." And there was no convincing them.) The Bible is full of appearances of the preincarnate Christ. The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said, "Hail thou mighty man of faith and power – that was Jesus Christ. In Isaiah chapter 6, when young Isaiah, the young ordinand, was officiating in Temple worship, no doubt trying so hard to get the liturgy right, that's when he saw the Lord – again, Jesus Christ, "high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple". Throughout the ages, from the earliest times in the Old Testament Christ has been known. He made His approach to Abraham with two angels announcing that Sarah would conceive and have a son in her old age. Christ Jesus is eternal, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Beloved before the world was wasing, Christ was.

The fire of Christ was in Paul, loving Him passionately after 30 years of ministry, and much of it characterized by suffering. Christ never grows old. I came into saving faith November 18, 1968, and every day of my life I run to the Word to feast on the delectables of Jesus Christ. Too many saints yawn their way through the Christian life. Seasons when they're up, and seasons when they're down. Too many have an 'on again off again' journey of faith, sometimes they spend years in defeat and then they climb that mountain again. That happens because they simply need to say, 'Lord, I surrender all.' Beloved, we were made to march in a parade of triumph, to be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." After 30 years, Paul had the fire of Christ burning within him. Is your heart as warm for Christ now as it was when you came to know Him? That is a question worth thinking about; and if not, why not? Do you crave Christ, do you hunger and thirst for Him? This was the heart of Paul – a passionate yearning within his own soul to know Christ deeply. Religion doesn't help that, only relationship. So here Paul is saying by way of summary, circumcision does not complete our salvation. Don't put confidence in any kind of work, and every day seek to know Christ deeply from the heart.

Now in vs. 12, and here we come to the morning lesson, it's as if Paul puts on his clinician's hat. As we begin to walk through these 5 verses, it's entirely possible that this night your entire Christian life could take on a dimension of newness that you've never known before. Let's look at what he is saying here very carefully. He says, "not that I have already obtained", to obtain or attain means to take hold of, to receive, or to make one's own, to apprehend in the moral or spiritual sense. So possibly Paul is here saying that he had not fully grasped all the meaning of Christ in his life. Paul believed there was more to receive by pressing on. Notice again vs. 12, despite all that he had undergone and suffered, he had not yet been made perfect; when Christ returns and we see Him "then we will be made like unto Him". Notice that he says again vs. 12, "But I press on." That is a hunting term, meaning to chase or hunt down. On the Damascus

Road Christ hunted Paul down and took hold of him, and now Paul is laying hold of the great prize of knowing Christ completely, thoroughly, deeply. He's pressing on, it's the all-consuming passion of his life. It's not his business, it's not money, Paul was not building an ecclesiastical empire.

When I was at the Mariemont Community Church, there was a young man on his way up, and he knew it. College at U.C., then law school, he got into international law and on the side bought a small company, then bought another company, then sold a company, wound up in his third law firm in international law, making hundreds and thousands of dollars, and his goal in life was to retire at age 55. He did, a couple of years ago. He'd dropped out of church years earlier, makes his home in Naples, maintains a home in Montana, travels the world, and will no doubt come to his grave in a ripe old age, failing to understand the deceitfulness of riches. Having no doubt never taking seriously the words of Jesus, "What does a man profit if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" It's strange that the more money a person makes, the harder it is to part with it.

Beloved, we're blessed to be a blessing, and blessed for no other reason, money often tries to own us. Let me illustrate this. A guy making \$50 thousand a year easily tithes, giving his church \$5,000 a year. But what if you're making a million a year, will a person give 100,000, his tithe to his church? My experience, to be blunt, is no; in fact, this is what I've heard, "I can't tithe to the church Reverend, because the church would begin to depend upon it", as if the church doesn't depend upon the \$5,000 by the man who only makes \$50 thousand a year. Oh, the deceitfulness of riches – it doesn't have to, but it can diminish, or put the fire of Christ out in our hearts.

Here's what I'm saying, never let anything, success, money, prosperity, incredibly good fortune, keep you from pressing on to know Christ deeply. Look at vs. 12 again, ... "But I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." When Christ took hold of us, He took hold of us for purpose. We must not be dissuaded from that purpose. We need to stay in the race, stay focused. This is what leads to the abundant life. Are you taking this to heart?

Look at vs. 13, "Brethren I do not count myself to have apprehended", the knowledge here is too high and too Holy, and not even Paul can attain to it, but there's one thing that he does, oh dear ones listen to this for all you're worth, "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to the things that are ahead." Paul was a man unwilling to dwell on the past; but you do, and that retards the Christian life. It's time to get past your past, and if a person says, 'But you don't know what I've done', and you're a Christian, then you don't understand the forgiveness of God. What is the nature of this forgetting that Paul has in mind? I believe it is the forgetting that occurs when we cease to let things that are in the past overshadow the present.

For example, maybe there's some compromise in the yesteryears of your life, and because of it you kind of hold back. It seems to be ever before your face. Oh yes, you're forgiven, and you're a Christian, but that thing is always there spoiling your journey of faith, and you've

assumed that because of it you can never really be used by God in any significant way. You know what that makes you, a leek and garlic Christian. Do you remember when the going got really hard for the children of Israel in the desert during their wilderness wanderings, and despite God's advocacy for them in the desert, their feet didn't swell, they didn't get diseases, God gave them manna from Heaven to eat, and brought water from the rock? They were sustained with an unending supply of the infinite benevolences of Jesus Christ, yet that nasty bunch said, "but we remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all, besides this mana, before our eyes." (Numbers 11:5, 6) Could they have been more offensive to God? Could they have sinned more terribly against the incomparable goodness of the living God? Yet God went on with them. Yes, there was some discipline and chastening, but they were not written out of the divine program, salvation history went forward through those people, and from that terribly low moment to the glory days of Solomon, God kept working with His people. Maybe you have a leek and garlic memory, wherein you transgressed in a very real way, then know for sure that Paul in this passage is inviting you to forget it. Literally it means to throw behind one's back.

When we are firing our muskets in line demonstrating how the Colonials fought, we hear the command, "load and make ready". We pull the powder out that is in a long paper tube, we bite it off, then pour powder into the pan, and the rest down the barrel, we ramrod it, bring the weapon straight up, then at the command, we fire. However, as soon as we pour the powder in the pan and then down the barrel, we take the paper and throw it behind our backs. It sounds so easy. Well, it is easy, but of course it's costly, this is made possible because of Christ, and his atoning death. But this is clearly what Paul is telling us as the believer's privilege, take that wounded memory, that horrible thing, that moment when you bitterly disappointed God and throw it behind your back, and when you throw it behind you, be done with it – take your gaze out of the rearview mirror, because the past no longer matters, and reach forward to all that is ahead for you in Jesus Christ. Paul says in vs. 14, "press toward the goal."

There's a little story that comes out of the life of David Livingston who invested his life as a Britisher in the heart of Africa. Finally, after many years he returned home, and one night at a great social event he was asked, "Well Dr. Livingston, where are you ready to go now?" He answered, "I am now ready to go anywhere, provided it be forward." I believe Paul would say the same thing. I believe that if we can get our minds clothed with the mind of Christ, that becomes our mantra also. "I am ready to go anywhere, provided it's forward." Paul had a high calling on his life and you do also. Paul kept pressing on to that upward call of God in Christ Jesus. We don't need to romanticize the call – the call is to live faithfully, obediently, serving the Lord with gladness.

In my first church, you recall that right out of seminary I went to Duke University, and I was an Associate. Then because I was on the board of bishops, I was sent back to New Jersey and I was an Associate Pastor again, but then I was given my own church for 7 years; I was 27 years



old, and my kids were coming along, our church was filling up with kids and young people, but from the git-go I was always a strong evangelical, and I did my best to teach the Word. I remember one Sunday morning a husband and wife said we want to do something next Sunday and we don't want to tell you what it is. I knew them both and they were not nuts, so I said ok. When I stepped out of my office that next Sunday morning and came down the hall to the sanctuary, which had big glass looking in, there was a big line of people trying to get in, and I wondered what the holdup was. This couple had a bowl in the basement and they were washing the feet of the saints, but the thing that was so arresting is that they both were weeping as they were doing so. It's amazing what God often calls us to do. Lowly things, lofty things, but the important thing is to be obedient. What Paul is arguing for here in these verses, is to go with God, not to get tangled in the past, and to be available.

Close your Bibles. What do you need to forget – to toss behind your back so that you can successfully press on going forward serving the Lord. I want us to silently pray, and if you will take that thing and throw it behind you, God will honor it in your life.

Let's look to the Lord in silent prayer.

*Thank you, Lord, for hearing us, and for allowing us to forget those things which are behind.  
Amen.*

Comments and questions.

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## THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(18)

### STANDING FAST IN THE LORD – EASIER SAID THAN DONE?

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

6/10/24

Philippians 3:17-4:1

I want to gather my thoughts up under the following title, “*Standing Fast in The Lord – Easier Said Than Done?*” In the passages before us Paul is fundamentally talking about a walk with God, and he is enjoining upon believers ‘a walk’ that is rock solid. Before I jump into the exposition I want to say a few things about walking with God.

1. This is a big theme in the New Testament, for example Ephesians 1:1 and 5:1 Paul talks about walking with the Lord. Indeed, there is an old hymn *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, and there’s one stanza that says, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love.” All of us have that potential proclivity, and therefore staying close to the great heart of Christ is the chief business of the believer.
2. If you’re going to walk with the Lord keep short accounts, if your debits, i.e. trespasses and sins, begin to mount up; repent. Unconfessed sin puts distance between our heart and His. It grieves the Holy Spirit. That will mitigate against your anointing and sense of intimacy with the Lord.
3. Ask God to keep you on a short leash. I have a short dog leash in my desk drawer. I sometimes take it out like a Roman Catholic would take out the Rosary. I hold it up to Heaven and I say, “Lord keep me on a short leash! Keep me close, and yank this leash when necessary. I don’t want to follow you from afar, but desire to be close at hand, and in the grip of the everlasting arms.
4. To walk with God, fuel that relationship constantly. For the believers Jesus Christ should be a continual feast. Feed on Christ by faith by making the Bible the centerpiece of your life.
5. To walk with the Lord, stay in the light. Be assured that if you walk in the seedy places, He will never approve of it; and you will grieve the lover of your soul.
6. Be obedient, a very necessary prerequisite for walking with the Lord. Jesus has said, “if you love me keep my commandments.” Do we not sing, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus.”
7. Identify and stay close to those who are Godly examples of walking with the Lord. We read in Genesis, “Now in those days there were giants in the land.” I’ve had some giants in my life, men I sought to imitate who modeled for me the heart of Christ. Bill Jenike taught me about the great mercy of God and the importance of gentleness. Russ Coburn

taught me that to be strong in the Lord we let God handle our issues. Ralph Marinacci taught me to trust the Holy Spirit for His empowering, and Steve Brown taught me that God's grace, not our performance forms the basis of our relationship. I found in these men that their lives reeked with the fragrance of Christ. They were different, unique, as though lit up from the inside. There has been another man in my life whose name I cannot share, and he has shown me since 1983 how our riches can serve Kingdom purposes, and that generosity, like a divine boomerang, always comes back to us. I've never known such a soul.

The high call of the Christian life is to walk worthily with the Lord; when we do it flatters the body of Christ, and it shows off Jesus Christ.

Here we begin our exposition with vs. 17, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." Paul is not being arrogant here. He has already mentioned Timothy and Epaphroditus as two other men who should be emulated. It's interesting that Paul could say this, because earlier in this very chapter he admitted that there were many things he had not yet attained in the Christian life, and yet he says "imitate me". Most of us would be hesitant to say to another person, imitate me, but are you not faithful? Do you not allow the Spirit of God to bring correction when necessary? Your appetites are not carnal but spiritual; you're a faithful churchman, your heart's desire is to err on the side of mercy – are these things not worthy of imitation? The New Living Translation renders Philippians 3:17 with Paul saying, "Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me and observe those who live according to the example you have in us." The word 'imitate' here means to obey, and the word 'example' means blueprint. We are to be an example to others, and we are to be a blueprint or model, showing off the struggle of the Christian life and the victory of the Christian life, and when we blow it or make mistakes or even offend against His divine majesty, we allow God to bring us up short, and we humble ourselves and seek His forgiveness. Paul was not saying here, imitate Christ, but rather to imitate himself and other Godly people. Watch their walk and allow yourself to be attracted to their hungry heart for Jesus Christ.

I think the burden of walking with the Lord is a life not of Christian perfection but of wanting to be conformed to His image. 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelicalism has produced some ideas that so spiritualized the nature of the Christian Walk that people hardly want to try it. The burden of walking with Christ is to incarnate Him, be a bond-servant of Christ, to conduct ourselves in a way that reveals His heart, it means to live in love, etc., etc. Here Paul is actually encouraging others to be imitators of himself. He certainly lived an exemplary life. We often hear the expression, 'Do as I say, not as I do.' Yet here's Paul holding up his own life as an example. Let us also remember that this man was a sinner saved by grace, and that he had struggles with his old life. In Romans he cried out "oh wretched man that I am." This was the man who said, "I know there dwells no good thing in my flesh."

I'm not trying to lower any standard here except to say that we can "walk with the Lord in the light of His Word."; and we should have some excitement about doing so. This particular verse tells us whom we should follow, and in the next verse we're told whom we should not

emulate, or follow. Vs. 18 says, “many walk” and here Paul is sharing this with tears in his eyes, “many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.” Paul does not identify these men specifically, possibly they were false brethren, Judaizers mentioned in vs. 2, or they were professed Christian teachers who had turned their liberty into a license and used grace as a pretext for sin. So, Paul is not identifying who these people are, but there were those, despite their profession, who were essentially enemies of the cross. They were enemies because of the harm they had done to Christ’s church, enemies because their lives had ruined the lives of others due to their corrupting influence. They were enemies of the cross because of the reproach they brought to the name of Jesus. Paul says of these people in vs. 19, that these kinds of people are destined to eternal perdition.

Notice the phrase, “also their God was their belly.” In other words, the idea is that these people battled their appetites, as F. B. Meyer, a great evangelical soul of a previous century, once wrote a very keen insight. “There is no chapel in their life. It is all kitchen.” You’ll note also in vs. 19, Paul says of such people that their glory was in their shame. Like Jeremiah once said of his generation “these have forgotten how to blush”, they were boasting of the very things they should have been ashamed of. Their minds were set on earthly things, that’s what got them out of bed in the mornings, what kind of food they would eat or clothing they would wear, or whether or not they would receive appropriate recognition; eternal issues and Heavenly things were not agenda items of high priority.

People that Paul has in mind were people who carried on as though they would live on earth forever. But now in vs. 20 Paul develops a contrast between the Heavenly minded attitude of the true believer, and those that were false. Recall that the Philippians were citizens of Rome as Philippi was a colony of Rome; thus, they had protection and privileges. But it’s against this backdrop that the Apostle reminds believers there that they had something better than Roman citizenship, namely they had citizenship in Heaven. It’s interesting that in one of the older translations of the Bible, the Moffat translation, he renders vs. 20 to us by saying, “but we are a Colony of Heaven.” While we are obedient to the government that we are under, we are also living out our obedience and allegiance to the Kingdom of God, of which we are citizens.

Not only are we citizens of Heaven, but we also eagerly await the Savior from Heaven, vs. 20b. The idea here is that one is waiting for something that is believed to be imminent. Literally in the Greek it means to thrust forward with the torso, with the head and neck, with an anxious expectation of hearing or seeing something. This is an active waiting that gathers up the totality of one’s personhood.

Now in vs. 21, Paul speaks of a particular work of God which is a part of the entire salvation package. He speaks of a moment when Christ will transform our lowly body that it might be conformed to His glorious body. This either happens when we meet the Lord in the rapture, or second return, or at the moment of death, because John tells us ... “when we see Him, we shall be made like unto Him.” Beloved, think of it, here comes another transformation, conversion is a transformation, sanctification is a continuous transformation, and then this transformation is the ultimate one, because it’s glorification. This we know, the limitations of time, all natural barriers, will be removed. On that day we will be perfectly suited to the conditions in Heaven. It

is the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus Christ. By the way, this transformation that's in view here on that final day, does not mean that we will be like Jesus Christ as far as the attributes of God are concerned, but we shall be morally like the Lord. We shall be forever free from sin.

Note the next phrase in vs. 21 ... "According to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself". The divine power that God will ultimately use to subdue all things and make them subservient to Himself is at play here in our lives. Think of this, Christ is able to save, Hebrews 7:25, Christ is able to aid us, Hebrews 2:18. Christ is able to keep us, Jude 24, and of course, as is revealed in the text, He is able to subdue. Christ can overthrow and subdue anything that mitigates against His highest intention for us. Here Paul is showing us the high ground of our standing, and the promised faithfulness of God to complete all that concerns us. After doing all of that in chapter 4:1 – given these privileges, this greater work that one day will be wrought in us, Paul exhorts the saints, again chapter 4:1, saying "stand fast in the Lord."

A few years ago, a brother called me crying. For 30 years he'd had an erratic walk with God. He lamented, "Why is there so much struggle in my life? For months and months, I'm turned on to God, then turn away for 2 or 3 years. Then I'm reclaimed. Why would anyone think I'm a Christian? I'm a real mess. It's all so hard and arduous for me." I heard his anguish. But then I said this to him as lovingly as I could, "People that love Christ don't love darkness anymore. You have yet to really make your mind up about the Savior." Let's get together and let's pray. It's time for the ultimate surrender, self-surrender, and you know what you've got to lay down." There was dead silence on the phone for almost a minute; then he hung up, and I've never heard from him again. Beloved, God cannot be mocked; He knows everything, and the sin that so easily besets us. He knows the compromises, the weaknesses, the hurts and wounds; yet, there is forgiveness with God and restoration. Beloved, come home to His great heart. Choose this day to have a walk with God that will feed your soul, and quicken and strengthen you in the inner person of your heart. You can "walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, and what a joy he will shed on your way". It's not too late. Right now tell Jesus Christ you want Him more than anything else. That's the kind of heart that stands fast with the Lord, and issues in a walk with God that is so inviting to the world.

Stand fast in the Lord – what that means is that we rest in what He's done for us. Let me say it again, we rest in what He has done for us. Paul says to these Philippians, you are my brethren, my brothers and sisters in Christ, you are my chief delight. You are my joy in my crown, and I don't want you to lose ground, or lose hope, or lose confidence, or lose your anointing. So Paul exhorts them, "stand fast in the Lord." Stand fast for the Lord, rest beloved, rest beloved, rest beloved, in what He has done for you. Be focused on that, revel and delight on that. Hold on to the one who is holding on to you. In other words, stand up, walk in what He's done for you. That's the secret of victory. How wondrous is the Christian life. Beloved, a robust Christian life that produces a life abundant is a product of standing fast in the Lord, namely resting in what He has done for us.

Listen, this entire chapter reveals Paul's yearning heart for the saints at Philippi, that they would be prevailing saints, victorious saints, rejoicing saints, moving in wisdom, not confused about the nature of salvation; believers going forward not allowing the past to destroy their

future. He yearned to see them pressing toward the goal of their upward call in Christ Jesus. He wanted them to follow his example and not be like so many who were enemies of the cross. He reminds them of their citizenship, and the ongoing transformations of the Christian life, and he reminds them to stand fast in the Lord. A heart that truly belongs to the Lord will want to be a heart that truly does that.

Here ends the lesson. Amen.

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## **THE EPISTLE OF JOY – PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS** **(19)**

### **GREAT PROMISES TO LIVE BY**

Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

6/17/24

Philippians 4:2-23

Our study in this epistle of joy is quickly coming to an end. Tonight, we come to this last chapter, and it’s almost as if Paul has saved the best for last. There are verses here that have sustained believers through the ages; precious promises that people have claimed in order to navigate the contrary currents of life. I’m amazed how God can speak through the scriptures. When I announced to my friends that I had decided to go to Princeton Theological Seminary, some that I was very close to drew back; “Your faith will get destroyed there. Remember Chuck Templeton and what happened to him? Billy Graham said that Templeton was God’s first choice, and he was ruined by that institution.” It shook me to the core. Then one night in my extremity I was reading from Philippians 4:22, “All the saints greet you, but especially those who are in Caesar’s household.” It was like God was speaking to me through a megaphone. Right in Caesar’s household God has his very own redeemed making the Emperor’s bed and fluffing his pillow, and no doubt praying over it. I thought, if God had his people there in Rome, in Caesar’s household, then he’s got His people at Princeton. With settled conviction I went to that institution and not for one moment ever regretted it. Oh, what an extraordinary time in my life. Beloved, God can speak through His Word, and this is a chapter that’s heavy with the voice of God.

We pick our exposition up with vs. 2, and two women are mentioned. No doubt they were strong, determined women, but there was conflict between them. They are not faulted, rather simply urged, or implored, to be reconciled ... to be of the same mind. Paul was not taking sides. These two women had gotten at cross purposes with one another regarding some issue in the church. These two women, are actually lifted up by Paul, as they had helped him in the Gospel. He counted them as fellow workers (vs. 3) and as truly redeemed women whose names are in the Book of Life. Beloved, sometimes it’s the better part of wisdom to submerge our petty personal differences and to get still and quiet, lest we turn a mole hill into a mountain. Godly people are going to disagree, but we don’t have to go to killing each other; doing despot to our witness.

There’s a great principle here, namely that we should prefer one another in love. We disagree, but we don’t break fellowship. We do not run away or gather people to our side. These were not bad women, not troublemakers, rather they were strong in the Lord, and they cared about the Church; and because they cared, Paul wanted this conflict to be managed carefully.

Also notice in vs. 3 that Paul addresses a true companion. What is the identity of this companion, or yokefellow is how it’s rendered in the Greek New Testament. Timothy and Dr. Luke have both been suggested, but it seems to me that Epaphroditus is probably the person in

viewed here; and so, he is exhorted to help these women who have labored with Paul in the Gospel. Remember Epaphroditus was a man to be emulated. To the Philippians he was a towering spirit, full of love and a man able to pour grace on a situation. As Epaphroditus waded into this conflict, he was to do so with the awareness that these women had labored with Paul in the promotion of the Gospel. Their hearts were in the right place. So, Paul was putting Epaphroditus in memory of this important factor.

People in the modern evangelical church want to fuss and fight over the role of women in church. I actually get bored with it. I love John MacArthur, but his ideas about women leave me cold. He's a great man of God and he's a wonderful loving shepherd, but he believes that a woman's place, pardon this awful phrase, is to be barefoot, in the kitchen, and pregnant. She doesn't work outside of the home, either during the child rearing years, or as an adult. God never intended her for the marketplace. In the church she is not to be heard from, 'never suffer a woman to teach in church'. As I've listened to MacArthur over the years, he's gotten worse along these lines.

Look, for me I hear Paul saying, in Christ there's neither Jew nor Gentile, nor slave nor barbarian, neither male nor female. Debra was a Judge. Esther was a mighty instrument, a prototype of Christ who made a way for the nation to be saved. Philip has daughters that were prophetesses, and then there was Pricilla and Aquilla. Over the course of my ministry, I've known women who were highly gifted in the Sunday school. At the Pitman United Methodist Church, Ralph Marinacci's wife may have sat in an elevated chair in front of the Sunday school for years and years and years. In my last church I had a woman on my staff who had pulpit duties and who occasionally preached. She was well equipped in understanding and teaching the Word ... in Christ there's neither male nor female.

I know all the arguments. I know the denominations that limit the role of women in church, and I've had some say 'That's that liberal Princeton effect on you Pastor Ed.' I don't think so. Rodney Dukes went to his grave saying that for over 50 years there were store front churches with women Pastors in the Assembly of God Church who brought many into saving faith, and whose children grew up and built great beautiful Assembly of God church buildings. Those store front women preachers put in motion the Assembly of God church in our age. Located in the best of neighborhoods, and which promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Beginning in vs. 4, Paul turns to the entire church and accentuates the great theme of the book, the great thing that should characterize the unfolding walk of all the redeemed. He says here that we should be a celebratory people, rejoicing in the Lord always. Then he says, let your gentleness be known to all men. (vs. 5) This has also been translated as yieldedness or a sweet reasonableness and a willingness to give up one's own way. The idea is to prefer others above ourselves. In other words, don't be on the muscle. Don't be pugnacious. The idea is to be accommodating, receive your brother, listen and be as accepting as you can. Isn't that the heart of Christ? Notice in chapter 4:5, he adds, "the Lord is at hand". Which may mean the Lord is



now present so act like it, or that His coming is near and you want Him well represented by your life.

In vs. 6 we come to one of those great verses, in fact by my count there are 7 great verses in this chapter that are so precious to believers. We already looked at the first one, (vs. 4) and now in vs. 6 we have the prescription for anxiety. Anxiety is assuming that what we fear most, will truly happen; and most of what we really dread never does happen.

Anxiety is a real problem. It's the great malady of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and on the face of it, this imperative seems rather challenging. "Be anxious for nothing." That is hard to do in a culture where on any day, something can befall us that will unravel our lives. Someone has said that anxiety is what happens when you live tomorrow today. Notice what is really said here, and what a prescription it is, in other words when there is anxiety make it captive to prayer, take it to God with thanksgiving and lay that request before the Lord, making it known; do it intentionally, deliberately, and forcefully. What will happen is that "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding" will take hold of you, and it will guard your heart from the ravages of anxiety, and it will guard your mind.

There's mystery here, and it sounds kind of simple, but this is God's way for us to rise above anxiety. Notice the fruit of this is the peace of God. Beloved we're not to live with a tremble, we are to live with the peace of God living supremely within us. How easy it is to tell ourselves the worst is going to happen; and it may appear to be so, however it's always the unseen hand of Providence, the advocacy of Christ for His own, and the plan that He ordained for us which never included that outcome. "Your eye has not seen, nor your ear heard, neither has it entered into your heart the good things God has for you." Expect the supremacy of Christ to reign supremely in your life. He's the able advocate. He pleads your cause. He's your rear guard, your shield and buckler; and He is a saving defense to His anointed. Happily, God is on duty. He is your dread warrior and dread champion. There is nothing in your tomorrows that can dismantle your heart for Christ, or separate you from His love. Listen you can be knocked down but not knocked out. Trust. Don't live another minute allowing yourself to be tormented by the 'what ifs', what if this doesn't happen, what if the job fails, what if the investment fails, what if the air conditioner goes out; what if, what if, what if. Anxiety, here's the prescription – it's knocked out with prayer. Earnest prayer with supplication and thanksgiving. We take this thing to God and He'll exchange that anxiety for His peace, and so much peace that it will be transcendent above understanding. (vs. 6)

Then here comes another great prescription, beloved, when the mind is not taken captive to Christ, we can fall to all kinds of anxieties. Beloved, listen, everything that is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report ... everything that is virtuous and praiseworthy – it's all found in Jesus Christ. These great virtues need to be considered one by one ... (vs. 8) "whatever things are true", in other words not false or unreliable, but genuine and real. He speaks of things that are 'noble' meaning honorable, high minded, morally attractive. The word 'just' means

righteous, acceptable to God. The word ‘pure’ means without spot or blemish in the character of a person’s life. Things that are ‘lovely’, there’s the idea of admirable or agreeable, to behold or consider. The phrase “of good report” can be rendered of good repute, or good standing. The word ‘virtue’ speaks of moral excellence, and ‘praiseworthy’ speaks of something that should be commended continually.

Paul is saying, keep your mind focused on these things that elevate. Let your mind be taken captive to all of these things that are found in the Word of God. The Bible says as a man thinketh in his heart, so he is. You can go to the scriptures and find examples of truth being lifted up of noble people of God doing justice, of the rewards of purity. There are such lovely moments in the Word of God, and we see all the things of good reports that flatter the lives of the saints. Virtuous living is commended, and many things are so praiseworthy, so heart-warming – this needs to be our focus. This imperative is really exhorting us to feed on Christ by faith. You have to make your mind up you want to live that way. It’s doable. This is not something that’s beyond us.

Then we come back to vs. 9 and here Paul sort of sets himself forth as a pattern for the saint. He encourages those to practice this very thing that he practices. That’s implied. Paul then commends the saints there for their care of him. Paul admits that he had experienced times of great financial leanness, perhaps even the absence of the necessities of life, but he was given the grace to deal with it. (Vs. 12) “I know how to abound. I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” Yet God kept him upright. Then comes another of those special verses:

Philippians 4:13

*“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

I bet in your life you have claimed that verse time and again. What Paul is talking about here and what he has in view when he says, “I can do all things”, he meant all things which were God’s will for him to do. Watch this, Paul had learned that the Lord’s commands are really the Lord’s enablement. Paul knew that God would never call on him to accomplish some task without being given the necessary grace. Sometimes we say it like this, God will never put you in a place of His appointing without giving you His rich anointing. God knows how to make us sufficient for His callings. Paul is saying here, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Imagine walking with Christ for 50 years and never putting yourself out there. I had a wonderful friend for many years who really knew the Bible. He was a beautiful man, a faithful churchman, and he had a great walk with God. I would say to him, “Brother, you need to teach a Sunday school or a small home group.” He’d bow his head and do that ‘aw shucks’ thing. Then he’d back pedal, go all humble, “No that’s not my thing, that’s not my calling.” I would say, “Why not test the waters? Trust Christ, you ‘can do all things through Christ who strengthens

you.’ Claim the verse, stand on the promise, let Christ be your sufficiency.” He never did. “That’s not my thing” ... “That’s not my calling.” I remember pushing him hard. It really made me mad; Christ’s church is too frequently impoverished because seasoned saints withhold themselves. You see Sunday school would mean every Sunday getting up earlier, studying through the week, and writing; and what if he wanted to miss on Sunday, and all of that? He wasn’t in my church, but I assume the Pastor was like many Pastors ... 2 Sundays out of 4 begging people to do something that could’ve brought great reward. We drifted apart and I never knew what became of him. I think it’s so exciting to take a great promise like this and to step out and say, “I can do all things”, this thing, through the divine enabling and empowering of Jesus Christ, because He will strengthen me.

The word ‘strengthen’ means to be infused with His life, or to be fortified with divine help. This is not exegetically correct, but it might be eisegetically correct. Exegesis is when we focus on the actual Greek word in the text, but eisegesis is what we read into a text that is consistent with the overall meaning of the text. By the way, usually when I teach from various passages of the Bible, I do my own free translation or paraphrase. You’d never see it of course, but I do it for my own clarity. So, this is how I render it, ‘I can do all things through Christ who gives me a Samson spirit.’ Samson spirit, that’s strength. By the way, people are always asking what was the secret of samson’s great strength. I’ve never thought Samson looked like an Arnold Swartzenhagger in his prime, I’ve always thought he was a shrimpy-looking sort of guy, he didn’t live in a gym 7 days a week. God always knows how to give us strength equal to the task.

In vs. 15, Paul thanks the church again for their faithfulness to him, especially on his first missionary journey when he departed from Macedonia and no other church stood with him, but they did; and for that they were commended, and Paul said God put that on your account. He acknowledges the great and wonderful supplies and necessities that were given to him by Epaphroditus’ visit; Paul received it as a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice that was pleasing to God. (vs. 18)

Another one of those great verses.

Philippians 4:19

*“And my God shall supply all of your need according to His riches in glory in Jesus Christ.”*

This verse is a tribute to the faithfulness of God, a scrutiny of our lives, a God who anticipates our needs before we need it. David Seamands used to say this verse reveals that God is the God of unending supply. Remember the story of Elisha and the widow who only had a jar of oil. This widow was married to one of the prophets and when he died, the creditors were coming. The only thing she had in her house was a jar of oil. Elisha said, “Go borrow vessels from all of your neighbors, empty vessels and gather up a lot of them.” Look at this with me in II Kings 4:4, “and when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you, and then pour your jar of oil into all those vessels” ... (vs. 6) “and it came to pass that all those other vessels

were made full.” That’s what God does. His riches are inexhaustible. He is the quintessential quarter master. He can supply all of our needs without exhausting His own. All of His riches are in glory, and they flow out from His benevolent hand.

This is going to sound goofy, but it was 1987 and we had moved into the first home I ever owned in ministry; I was 38 years of age. We moved in on May 1, and I remember that season in my life so well. My daughter was 10, and my son was 17 months younger, 8 years of age, nearly 9. I would go on a jog, (for well over 25 years I was a consummate runner, not a competitive runner) and in the strip shopping center there in Landen, there was a travel agency. When I would complete my jog, I would walk past it and see the pictures advertising the cruises and some of the beautiful places to vacation. The only place we ever visited was the eastern shore with my grandparents, and this was 17 years into our marriage. I began to pray, “Lord, I need to be able to have a vacation, I would love to be able to get away. I don’t have the money, and I’m asking you if you could make this possible?” I didn’t fret over it, but at least 4 days a week when I would run, I’d stand by the store window of that travel agency and sort of put my hand over one of those areas, and say, “Thou knowest.”

One day I got a call from my wife’s boss, and he said, “We’ve got a beautiful home in a gated community down here at Daytona Beach, you’ll love it. I want you to be able to use my home every year.” He was a Senior Vice-President of Cintas. So, we did. What a magnificent house it was; breathtaking. I always wondered how the other half lived; I liked it so much. We would go down there for 2 weeks at a time. It was a beautiful home. It even had a linen service; they would come twice a week to bring fresh towels, change the bedsheets and all of that.

We would arrive in a big ‘ol station wagon with a big case on top – sort of like the Hillbillies arriving in Beverly Hills. It was one upscale place. The pool that came with it was just right out of Hollywood. A few years later I was offered another magnificent home in a gated community at Coney Lake in Southeast Georgia, I would often go there with my Uncle H and my Aunt Barbara. We did it twice a year for 15 years, and then God made it possible for me to vacation at Hilton Head, and some at Chincoteague and Assateague Islands ... here’s the point, our God is an extravagant God. He loves His children, and He knows the needs that we have.

Seminary professors take sabbaticals, being gone for a half a year or a year. Well, I’m not a seminary professor, and all I needed was a week away. Now the collective memories I’ve had, and all the more so for the last 7 to 8 years with Billie, have yielded up extraordinary times of renewal and fun. God knows what we need even before we ask Him, and he’s not going to run low on His supplies by helping us.

With respect to vs. 19 remember that Paul is speaking to the Philippians, they had been generous ... they had emptied their coffers for the sake of Paul. Paul is putting them in remembrance of God’s extravagance, “...my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ.” In other words, Paul is saying to the Philippians, you’ve been

very generous, God's going to keep giving it back to you ... keep filling your jar of oil because He is a God of unending supply.

Paul closes by saying in vs. 21, remember us to the saints; and those with me greet you. Then of course that great verse God used in my life so many years ago the very moment when God proved my education at Princeton. (Vs. 22) *"All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household."* God has His people everywhere, right in Caesar's household.

Paul was in Rome, in prison, and he knew lots of believers that were showing up to hear him. Some of those who were fluffing Caesar's pillow and making his bed, were also coming to hear Paul. By this point Paul has been in ministry nearly 30 years. He is a seasoned man. Indeed, as was prophesied over him by Ananias in Acts chapter 9, he had borne the name of Christ before Gentiles, Kings and the children of Israel, he had endured hardships and the abuses of men, he had been stoned and beaten within an inch of his life on many occasions; yet, he had "endured hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." As he thought about it, there was great joy in his life, and great fulfillment as he walked with his Savior.

Therefore; to recap the Book of Philippians:

**Chapter 1** – Christ is the one who always completes the good work that He has started within us.

**Chapter 2** – Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but humbled Himself and became obedient to the cross.

**Chapter 3** – Christ is revealed as one greater than all of the loss we could ever experience in all of this life.

**Chapter 4** – He is the God of unending supply.

Indeed, when we consider the epistle as a whole, it invites us to walk in the joy of the Lord, to laugh the laughter of the redeemed. This little book is an epistle of encouragement, satiated with great promises and great wisdom, it shows off the heart of Christ, and gives us a portrait of God who never withholds Himself. David Seamands used to say, the Book of Philippians is our very own prayer book, and that what is here is sufficient for daily prayer all the days of our lives.

It seems to me that Paul had an extraordinary affection for the believers at Philippi, and I believe that when he closed his eyes in death, he thought of Lydia, the seller of purple, and the little slave girl - delivered from her bondages and given a whole new life. I think of her as being very pretty and being married by the man of her dreams; producing children who knew the Lord. Then the Philippian jailer, so wonderfully saved. Only 3 people; yet 10 years later, one of the great churches that Paul founded. I think when he crossed the bar he thought about Lydia, and the slave girl, and the jailer, and that he entered the eternal Kingdom, delighting in the Gospel, and the power of that message that produced such a wonderful church.

In this life we need people to love us, and the church at Philippi loved Paul. That body of Christ was the apple of his eye, and brought rejoicing to his heart, and hence this *Epistle of Joy*. Here ends the lesson, and here ends our study of Philippians.

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