

Philippians



I can do
ALL THINGS
Through
CHRIST
which
STRENGTHENETH
ME
Phil. 4:13

Philippians

By

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Study 1

The Setting

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:1-2).

The background

Philippi was one of the major cities of Macedonia and was named after Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. In 42 B.C. Octavius made the city a colony of Rome (Acts 16:12), and in 31 B.C. Augustus populated it with a large number of Roman veterans and made it a military post after his victory over Brutus and Cassius. It was like a Roman island in the midst of other cultures, for while Rome governed many regions and countries in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, few threw off their traditions, language and culture as Philippi did. Very quickly the city became purely Roman, Latin becoming the official language, and its citizens believing themselves to be Roman rather than Macedonian. A picture of their loyalty to Rome can be seen in Acts 16:19-21, **“They caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.”** Philippi was considered to be the gateway to Europe for it lay on the Roman road known as ‘The Egnatian Way’. The city was perched on a range of hills that separated Europe from Asia and as a result was a natural fortress. Paul knew that the Philippian converts, whose employment took them on the Egnatian Way to both the Roman Empire and Asia, could be ambassadors for the Lord too.

The church

Philippi was the first city in Europe to hear the Gospel of Christ in any real way, though we have to assume that they had received at least vague news about what was taking place in Israel at the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5-11-12). The church was founded by Paul in A.D. 51 with his team of co-workers (Silas, Timothy and Luke), after responding to a vision he had in Troas. **“Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them”** (Acts 16:6-10). We see that the Holy Spirit had plans for Philippi even before Paul was called there to bring the first soul to Christ. If Paul had ignored the leading of the Spirit and

gone in the other direction, we might still be waiting to hear the gospel today. He quickly realised that just as Philippi was a strategic Roman colony, so it could also be for the gospel, thus becoming the gateway to the world. It seems that Paul visited the region during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-40). The Jewish population of the city was so small that they did not even have their own synagogue but met for worship and prayer beside the River Gangitis, which was about half a mile from the centre. That there were few Jews in Philippi meant that the gospel was not hindered as much as it was in other regions. In fact we read of no opposition from the Jews in this city. It is here that Lydia, the first Philippian convert to Christianity, opened her home for meetings. Maybe she was the spark that ignited the flame of generosity in the Philippian church. **“Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God”** (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). A strong bond of friendship developed between Paul and the church. It seems that he visited the believers on two other occasions during his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1, 3, 6).

Where the Gospel of Christ abounds, so the anger of false religion and paganism increases against the church. The new believers soon encountered persecution, but instead of being defeated, they grew in number. The story of the conversion of the Philippian Jailor is a case in point, and it reveals just how effectively the word of God was being preached. **“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house”** (Acts 16:25-34)

In 52 A.D. Paul ordained Timothy as the spiritual leader of the church. Later, in 58 A.D. he would return to collect the offerings the church had raised to assist the poor believers in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians chapter 8 & 9). They were generous givers and so sent financial assistance to Paul on several occasions (2 Corinthians 11:9; Philippians 4:15-16).

The author

The Philippian Epistle is clearly written from Rome while Paul was in prison. Though the date of writing cannot be positively fixed, it is likely to be around 63 – 64 A.D. Various church fathers, including Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius and Irenaeus, make mention of or allude to Paul being the author of this epistle. There is some question whether Paul wrote this during his first or second imprisonment, but the actual situation in no way affects the message he wanted to convey. Most scholars believe that this is the last of Paul's prison letters. In this epistle the author communicates his true feelings about his personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It also offers us a better insight to his character, for the harsh authoritarian that some commentators think Paul was is not evident here.

The themes

Whilst there are several themes running through the letter, the major could be said to be 'The Spiritual Experience of the True Christian'. Paul assumes that the Philippian believers accept the teachings of Scripture without question, and so he is happy to call them "Saints in Christ Jesus".

Paul also wrote this letter to:

- 1) Thank the church for their participation in the Gospel.
- 2) Tell them about his personal circumstances, fears and hopes.
- 3) Encourage them to stay united, humble and consistent.
- 4) Explain why he was sending Timothy to them.
- 5) Warn against the Judaizers, antinomians and perfectionists.
- 6) Ask that Euodias and Syntyche be reconciled.
- 7) Encourage them to keep praying, rejoicing, and obeying God's word.
- 8) Thank them for their generous financial assistance.

This epistle was not written simply to rebuke doctrinal conflicts in the church, for its tone is one love, affection and thanksgiving. It focuses upon the Lord Jesus Christ and how He empowers believers to live a holy and dedicated lives (4:15). Nothing in this life can surpass the value of knowing Christ as Saviour, thus the letter is highly Christocentric and reflects the author's relationship with the Lord. It also contains one of most profound Christological statements to be found anywhere in Scripture (2:5-11). The Epistle to the Philippians is a very personal and therefore a highly practical letter.

It is difficult to highlight a single key verse in the epistle, for there is no many to choose from, but probably the verse that is central to Paul's theology and thinking is found in 1:21, "**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**" Second to this must come his thoughts on Christian joy. This is remarkable when we consider that Paul was suffering in a prison cell. His relationship with Christ was not dark and morose, but instead it was firmly grounded in joy. "**Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice**" (Philippians 4:4). He might not have been in a happy situation, but he had joy in his heart because he knew that Christ was his Saviour.

Conclusion

As we venture into this God-inspired letter from the pen of the apostle Paul, we will quickly realise that he would not accept the modern notion of 'half-way'

believers. For him the Christian experience must be worked out in daily life, in the strength of Christ and according to the will of God. **“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ ... Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God ... Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ... For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”** (Philippians 1:6, 11, 2:5, 13). In this letter we will find a treasure trove of important and valuable truths upon which, if we put them into action, we will grow into mature, fruitful and faithful believers. **“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample”** (Philippians 3:17).

Study 2

Salutations

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:1-2).

Introduction

Philippi had the distinction of being the first European city to receive the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore the first Gentile Christian Church was established there. At the time of writing of this epistle, the apostle Paul was probably quite old, since it is the last of his so-called prison letters. **“Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ”** (Philemon :9). **“Paul and Timotheus”**. Describes the relationship that existed between the pair. Paul is the mature father figure, whose only limitation is his age, and Timothy the vibrant, youthful son who had energy to spare for future exploits.

Servants

Paul was being assisted by Timothy, who must have been a source of blessing and encouragement while he was languishing in his cell. There is no suggestion in this text that Timothy co-authored the letter, for in verse 3 we note the use of the word “I” to denote it was entirely the apostle’s work. Paul does not lay claim to apostleship in this letter, which is significant when we consider his wonderful description of the humility and humiliation of Christ in 2:1-11. Therefore, like his Master, Paul did not grasp at recognition or exaltation. Paul saw Timothy and himself as servants, that is, bond-slaves [Greek ‘doulos’], or in other words, the lowest class in society. Notice that Paul does not raise himself one iota over Timothy, but speaks of him as equal partners in the work. He believed that he was owned by the Lord and was at His disposal. This is not a case of false humility, for he knew the important role that he played in his service to God. **“For which I am an ambassador in bonds”** (Ephesians 6:20). **“Servants”** also expresses Paul’s belief that he and

Timothy had the highest and most important profession in the world since they were in the service of God. **“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul”** (Deuteronomy 10:12). We tend to think of the great figures from Biblical history as having superhuman power, but each one was simply a servant of the Living God and men and women of **“like passions”** (James 5:17).

It is also true to say that Paul did not need to refer to himself as an apostle or defend his calling from God for another possible reason. His relationship with the Philippian church was strong and firmly based on love for the Lord and His people. They knew the anointing was upon his life and so did not need to be reminded of it. They were eager and willing to listen and obey his instructions without coercion. This is not to suggest that Paul hesitated to use his apostolic authority. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 5 reveal that he used his God-given right whenever necessary, nevertheless, he never lorded it over anyone.

Saints

The word “saint” is never used in Scripture of some departed soul that has some special favours to bestow upon his followers; instead it always refers to living persons who have truly dedicated themselves to Christ. Neither is it used in reference to those who think they have arrived at a state of spiritual perfection. This title was used to speak of the Jewish believers too, **“Saints at Jerusalem”** (Acts 9:13). These are they who desire and aim for holiness, sanctification and godliness in their daily lives. How can we be lethargic and complacent about our faith? How can we live indulgent and selfish lives when we know that holiness is required of us? **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”** (2 Peter 3:10-12) ... **“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling”** (Hebrews 3:1) ... **“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”** (1 Peter 1:15-16).

A true saint must be and remain in Christ. Unless a person is in Christ there is no salvation, and unless he remains in Christ, he cannot bear fruit as evidence of that salvation. **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me”** (John 15:4). “In Christ Jesus” reveals that the “saints” are the only elect that the Bible speaks of in relation to salvation as long as they aim at holiness and obedience. **“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”** (1 Peter 1:2). Therefore the elect are those who have truly dedicated their lives to

faithfully following Christ. Practical holiness is something that ought to be interwoven into the very fabric of our lives.

Shepherds

In 1 Peter 2:5 Peter writes about the priesthood of all believers, **“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”**. Nevertheless it is evident that the church needs spiritually mature men to oversee the work and teach the word. **“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”** (1 Peter 4:11). The same persons are called **“elders”** in Acts 20:17.

Bishops simply means pastor. The Greek word ‘episkopos’ is also used for ‘shepherd’ and ‘overseer’, **“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood”** (Acts 20:28). We ought to clearly see that a shepherd not only looks after his flock but also leads them to pastureland (Psalm 23). God has ordained teaching ministries to enable and build up the church. **“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”** (Ephesians 4:11-16). This said, we must not infer that those in the preaching and teaching ministry are ‘high officials’ who exercised control over the church, but instead they are simply fellow-labourers in the work of Christ. (See also 1 Timothy 3:1-11 and Titus 1:5-9).

“Deacons” [Gk. ‘diaknos’ meaning ‘those who serve’] refers to elders whose duty it was to assist the ministry in the local church. In Acts 6 we find that several men, including Stephen, being chosen to serve the church while the leaders gave themselves **“continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word”** (:4). Even so, these men had to be **“of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom”** (:3). Deacons were also engaged in the preaching and teaching ministry. **“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers [diakonoi] by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?”** (1 Corinthians 3:5). Philip one of the first deacons (Acts 6:5), also known as **“Philip the evangelist”** (Acts 21:8), was a Spirit-filled preacher (Acts 8:5).

Though the church was founded in Lydia’s house (Acts 16), she gracefully and obediently took the Scriptural approach to leadership. The early church knew nothing of women serving as pastors or engaging in a similar role.

Salutations

Paul wishes the church grace and peace; two gifts of God that no believe can do without. The Hebrew word for peace is 'shalom', it includes the wish for both temporal and spiritual prosperity. **“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”** (Hebrews 4:16) ... **“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:6-7). True and everlasting peace can only come where God's grace is applied to the soul.

Conclusion

In these two verses the apostle Paul sets the tenor for the rest of his letter. We will find the themes of godliness, humility and thanksgiving coming to the surface time and again. The Philippian church was not perfect, but it serves as a good example of what a church and individual Christians should aim at.

Study 3

Good Work

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:3-6).

Introduction

Some theologians and commentators present the apostle Paul as a rather strict and harsh character, but certainly his letter to the Philippian church does not testify to such an assessment of him. Instead he comes across to us as a loving and concerned man of God who has the best interests of his flock at heart. Whatever scholars might say, from what we shall see in this and future studies, Paul's Christlike nature shines through.

Thanksgiving

Paul praised God for the church at Philippi whenever he remembered them in prayer. How often, when we pray, do we call to mind all the nasty and unkind things others have done for us? Maybe we call down God's wrath upon them rather than ask for them to be blessed. Whenever Paul thought of the believers in Philippi he could not help but rejoice in the Lord and request that they be abundantly blessed just as he did for other congregations also. **“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers”** (Romans 1:9) ... **“We give thanks to God always for you all, making**

mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3) ... “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (Colossians 1:3).

The word “remembrance” does not describe a passing thought as Paul moves on to pray about his own conditions, rather it means ‘to make mention’, and thus suggests that he made mention of each person by name. This, with the word “joy”, reveals that such prayers were a daily delight rather than a bothersome burden. We note that the word “joy” is the characteristic feature of this letter, just as ‘love’ is in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Nothing about the church in Philippi caused Paul any great pain, but instead he felt immense joy knowing that they loved the Lord. The Greek word used here for “joy” is ‘chara’ means ‘inner gladness, deep-seated pleasure’. The apostle had a personal and intimate interest in them ever since he brought the message of salvation to Philippi. He prayed that they would have the love that leads to spiritual maturity and moral purity. The salvation of others ought always be a source of joy for us too, for it is certainly for the present inhabitants of Heaven. **“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10).**

If the apostle Paul needed the support of likeminded believers, how much more do we? Do we take the time to thank God for each other? We do not exist in a vacuum, therefore we need the rest of the body of Christ if we are to grow and prosper in the Lord. **“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light ... And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Colossians 1:12, 3:15).** All this is lost on those who forsake the **“assembling”** of themselves **“together”** with other Christians (Hebrews 10:25).

Togetherhness

He was overjoyed and thrilled knowing that these Christians had faith. Whenever he received news of their work in spreading the gospel, it must have made the chains a little lighter. **“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country” (Proverbs 25:25).** Though he was awaiting trial and an uncertain future, amazingly Paul writes an uplifting letter, and in doing so shares his joy with the church. Are we a source of joy to those around us?

“Fellowship” expresses the fact that the Christian community is meant to be more than a title we hang over a doorway or a meeting we might attend during the week. Paul was in fellowship with the Philippian believers even though he had not seen them for several years and despite the fact that great distances separated him from them. It was the gospel of Christ that united their spirits together. Christians have the fellowship of the Father (1 John 1:3), of the Son (1 Corinthians 1:9), and of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14). The word has the meaning of ‘having things in common’ or ‘common ground’. What other common ground can believers have than Christ Himself! Where He is not the centre of our focus there is no grounds for true Christian fellowship. In other words, our lives are bound together in the Spirit of Christ. **“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1**

John 1:7). We will see in a later study that the church supported Paul financially too and so this fact must be seen in the light of their “fellowship” with him. **“Distributing to the necessity of saints”** (Romans 12:13) ... **“And all that believed were together, and had all things common”** (Acts 2:44) ... **“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common”** (Acts 4:32).

Thoroughness

It had been ten years since the gospel had been preached in Philippi, but the believers there were still actively serving the Lord and His church. The church had remained true to Christ and was willing to support the ministry of Paul. He was convinced that their zeal for the Lord would continue to increase and that God would continue pour out His power upon them. There is nothing lacking in God’s power, for He is more than able to bring all who submit to Him to perfection and completeness in Christ. The modern church might not like to hear about sanctification, but without it there can be no victory or blessing. **“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”** (Jude :24) ... **“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification”** (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Verse 6 of this study offers us a very important truth, one that some seem eager to ignore or explain away. The final part of God’s work is the redemption of the body in the day of Christ; therefore it cannot be accomplished until He returns. **“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Corinthians 15:51-57). This of course does not mean that He is not working in us right now. He is working in us to perform His will and to conform us to the image of His Son. **“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son”** (Romans 8:29). The words “perform it until” have the meaning of ‘perfect it up to’, therefore God’s work continues until **“that which is perfect is come”** (1 Corinthians 13:10). The Psalmist writes, **“The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me”** (Psalm 138:8) and we can rest assured that God always finishes what He sets out to do, for is not **“Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”** (Hebrews 12:2)? When we get discouraged let us remind ourselves that God picked us for His team and that He had not given up on us. **“Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Corinthians 1:8) ... **“That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ”** (Philippians 1:10).

Paul's confidence in the believers in Philippi was not based solely upon God's work in them, but includes the zeal and sacrifice of faith that they possessed (1:7, 4:15-18). In this we see that our faithfulness towards God is a vital part of what proceeds from salvation, for He will not work in those who resist His work of grace. **"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"** (Philippians 2:13).

Conclusion

Those who labour for the Lord in faith and obedience will see their work come to completion. We will not see the ultimate result of our work until Christ comes to set up His Millennial Kingdom, but evidence of the work must be in existence before He does. Salvation is not a static or stagnant work of God, therefore we must continue to rely upon Him while He completes what He started in us. Our faithful God will not forget us, grow weary with or give up on us. **"Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep"** (Psalm 121:4). Whatever we do, let us do it as a service of love and joy for the Lord. **"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him"** (Colossians 3:17). Let us also uphold our fellow-labourers in prayer and support them as the Lord leads.

Study 4

Abounding Love

"Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:7-11).

Introduction

Paul prays that the Philippian believers would be blessed in every possible way. Here is a man, an aged man, who is undergoing privation and suffering, but instead of focusing upon his problems, we find him in prayer for others. This reveals Paul's selfless shepherd's heart.

Affection

The Philippians had been ministering to the apostle while he was in prison, and they would continue to do so when he was released and able to preach again. His burden was theirs. **"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"** (Galatians 6:2) ... **"Remember them that are in bonds,**

as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Hebrews 13:3). We see his affection for them as he writes that they are always in his heart. The margin of the King James Bible has the alternative rendering “Ye have me in your hearts”, which if accepted would only emphasize the mutual affection that existed between both parties. This is proof that his spirit was full of Christian love for them, that was unbroken by the torment of his confinement. **“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love”** (Colossians 2:2). They who shared his afflictions were blessed to share his affection. The words “bonds”, “defence” and “confirmation” are courtroom terms and reveal that Paul considered that the Philippian church shared with him in his courageous witness before the judges of Rome. **“In my heart”** also means that Paul cherished them like a treasured love letter. **“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men”** (2 Corinthians 3:2). Such love is the true expression of Christ’s love in us.

Apology

The word “defence” is derived from a legal term in Greek, ‘apologia’ does not mean to be sorry about something, a word that expresses the need for sound doctrine – a defence speech. The word of God can only be confirmed by them who stand firm in it. False doctrines are the lies of the devil to destroy the church, but we must be strong in our faith and resist them all. Like Paul, it does not matter if we have difficulties, sufferings, or problems, the most important duty of a good soldier of Christ is to stand firm in His word. **“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”** (2 Timothy 2:3). The gospel that strengthens its friends also overthrows its foes.

Abound

Christians should have a deep love for their fellow believers. **“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”** (John 13:35). The love of the Philippian church abounded, that is, overflowed, in every direction. This kind of love is not based upon emotions, feelings or circumstances, but instead it grows from a life fixed on Biblical truth. This is why it has to be in “knowledge and in all judgement.” “Knowledge” [Gk. ‘epignosis’] means ‘spiritual knowledge in the heart’ rather than head knowledge gained through education, therefore it is both doctrinal and practical in nature. It refers to experimental understanding of revealed truth, or simply put, truth that is acted upon. **“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”** (Ephesians 3:16-19). This means that it had to be according to God’s word and good spiritual sense. We could term this as ‘spiritual perception’ (“**judgement**”). Any believer who has this will discern what is good and bad and act accordingly. The kind of love Paul is discussing reaches out sacrificially to others in need, but it has to be more than humanitarianism, for it is just as possible to have love without knowledge, just as it is to have knowledge without love (1 Corinthians 13:2). This love needs

to be cultivated in our churches. It is a love that builds up rather than destroys the weak (Romans 14), because it is the love given to us by the Spirit of God. **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith”** (Galatians 5:22).

Approve

To “approve things that are excellent” includes the preaching of the gospel and the love of believers. The word “approve” means ‘to make a distinction between’ or ‘to differentiate’. Paul is saying that believers must test everything to make sure they do not deviate even slightly from the revealed word. Therefore we ought to accept only that which is of and promotes godliness. **“Abstain from all appearance of evil”** (1 Thessalonians 5:22). This sometimes means that we must personally reprimand false teachers. **“Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith”** (Titus 1:13). Above all we must have the discernment that only God can give us. **“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”** (Hebrews 5:14). As followers of Christ we must aim for the excellent rather than the ordinary. We are not here simply to be good people, but to be excellent Christians, for the good is often the enemy of the best. We should be enrolled in the School of Advanced Excellence.

Aboveboard

“Sincere” means ‘to be without mixture’ and ‘completely pure’, the Greek root means to ‘examine in the sunlight to make sure it is sound’. This sincerity is not the same as the world’s definition of the word. In the natural it infers that a person can sincerely believe something is right when it is in fact completely wrong. There is no such liberty with the Bible use of the word. We are not to be of those who are sincerely wrong, but we should always be sincerely right. This calls for purity in every area of our lives. The word “sincere” also means to be ‘without wax’. Often those selling sculptures would hide blemishes and chips with wax to deceive the buyer. **“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”** (Ephesians 5:27). Let us always be aboveboard in everything and aim to live holy lives before God and man. We can be “without offence” [blameless] in all aspects of life and never give anyone just cause for pointing their finger at us and calling us hypocrites. **“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God”** (1 Corinthians 10:32).

Activity

Our lives ought to be filled to overflowing with the righteousness of God. If we are, we will bring glory, honour and praise to Him. Those who are saved by grace should have the corresponding fruits of godliness in their lives. **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”** (Galatians 5:22-23). This fruit is the product of true righteousness and proves that the person is abiding in Christ. **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me”** (John 15:4). It is remarkably easy for

nominal Christians [churchgoers] to counterfeit the fruit of the Spirit, but in the end religious activity will stand barren at the Judgement Seat of Christ. They might make a song and dance about how 'christian' they have been, but remember a tree produces fruit without noise. Our activity is obeying the will of God as revealed in Scripture. **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:10).

Conclusion

It is not what the world or the church thinks a good Christian is; what matters is what God says about it. The Holy Spirit makes it abundantly clear how we are to live in this fallen world, that is, how we are to interact with both fellow-believers and the lost. Sadly despite the clarity of the Bible many believe that they can live any way they please and still be called saints. We must defend the gospel of salvation and confirm it by word and by the way we live it out.

Study 5

Preaching Christ

“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:12-19).

Introduction

Paul was not in prison for any evil thing he had done; instead he had simply been preaching the gospel of Christ. Also, his ordeal was prolonged due to the fact that the Jewish prosecutors had not bothered to travel to Rome to accuse him of the trumped-up charges they had levelled against him. He would spend two years in prison, though it seems that he was allowed visitors.

Bonds

The Philippian church may have feared that Paul's imprisonment would be detrimental to the spread of the gospel; he assures them that will not be the case. Being bound with chains in a Roman prison cell may not appear to be a good base from where the truth might be preached, yet Paul used the

situation, not to whimper and moan, but to tell others about Christ. The “palace” was in fact the Praetorium, which housed the Emperor’s elite army of 10,000 men. The building was probably within the palace grounds. His imprisonment made him even more determined to spread the word of God by whatever means at his disposal, so we can be sure that Paul was delighted to present it to the greatest nation on earth at that time. He saw himself as an ambassador in the service of Christ, **“For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak”** (Ephesians 6:20). It seems that he had influenced his guards with the gospel, which offered him the opportunity to write letters to various churches, and the message they contain are a blessing to readers even today. Therefore he would have called this ‘fortune out of misfortune’. **“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”** (Romans 8:28). Nothing should be allowed to hinder the progress of God’s word. **“Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound”** (2 Timothy 2:9). We should aim at being faithful witnesses regardless of the difficulties life and the enemies of God throw against us.

Bold

Instead of cowering in fear of arrest and imprisonment, the early church boldly continued to preach and teach about Christ. It is said that the winds of persecution often fan the flames of revival. Every time the authorities attempted to stamp out the faith, the Lord would raise up more warriors. We notice the word “many”, for as we shall see, not everyone was delighted about the preaching of the gospel. Persecution is a frightening thing, but if we trust in the Lord, He will strengthen and make us courageous. **“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”** (2 Timothy 3:12).

Belligerence

There were some believers who did not agree with Paul’s message and belittled and condemned him. Maybe they thought by taking such a position the authorities would not bother them. While the faithful proclaimed the gospel under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, others did so with a contentious spirit. The word “contention” means ‘selfish ambition’, the root of it is similar to the modern word ‘electioneering’. Maybe those false brethren thought they had been given a golden opportunity to completely discredit Paul and his ministry. This is the position of the hireling that has no love for the sheep. It is also likely that some felt intimidated by Paul’s dedication to God. Were they jealous of his ministry? This proves that a person can preach a sound word but be motivated by the flesh rather than the Spirit of God. Paul was not like them, for while they loved their positions, he loved the Lord. It is possible that these people believed that persecution was a sign that God was not with Paul. **“As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ”** (Galatians 6:12). Nevertheless, we can assume that his chains felt a little heavier whenever he learned what these foolish people were doing and saying against him. A mature follower of Christ must not allow personal jealousy or desire for recognition to hinder the work of God.

Battle

God had commissioned Paul with the important task of defending the gospel of Christ. All truly saved believers have exactly the same responsibility to resist whoever seeks to distort the truth. **“As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed”** (Galatians 1:9). Such a godly conviction is foreign to those who love the world and avoid obedience to Christ.

Paul was determined to battle on and **“Fight the good fight of faith”** (1 Timothy 6:12). He would not, as so many have done, water down or compromise the truth to avoid personal suffering. Believers are called to stand squarely for the word of God. **“Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”** (Jude :3). While it would have been understandable for Paul to become discouraged, he chose to rejoice, and thank God that His word was being preached even by those who did not like him. **“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee”** (Psalm 76:10).

Belief

“Salvation” in :19 refers to Paul’s belief that he might be released from prison. Some commentators write that it was deliverance from criticism and opposition. Did he have in mind Job 13:16 when he wrote these words? The Septuagint version of that text reads, **“This shall turn out to my salvation.”** Whichever is true, we can be certain that the apostle had his faith firmly fixed in Christ. **“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”** (2 Timothy 1:12). He believed that the Lord would answer the prayers of the Philippian church for his release and protection, and that the message of truth will continue to be spread abroad. Even the weakest saint can be strong in prayer and have an influence on the destiny of others. **“Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf”** (2 Corinthians 1:11).

The “Spirit of Jesus Christ” is not separate from the Holy Spirit, but is the same person. **“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”** (Romans 8:9) ... **“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father”** (Galatians 4:6). Paul believed that the Holy Spirit would supply all he needed to get him through the circumstances he was enduring. This of course is part of the ministry of the Spirit. **“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever”** (John 14:16) ... **“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together”** (Romans 8:16-17).

Conclusion

How far do we think the gospel would have reached if everyone commissioned to preach it were too scared to do so? Weak people are not an encouragement to others, but those who are strong in the Lord always are.

We should remember to thank God for the courageous preachers, missionaries and evangelist, many of whom were martyred for their faith, for without them we might not have the liberty to spread the same gospel today. They are a good example for us when we face our times of trial and trouble. **“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might”** (Ephesians 6:10).

Study 6

Earnest Expectation

“According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again” (Philippians 1:20-26).

Introduction

We have learned that the apostle Paul was in prison and facing the death penalty for crimes he had not committed, but rather than buckling under the pressure, he reveals that he has the strength that only God can give. He was able to turn his focus away from his personal problems and fix his attention on what really mattered, which is, to magnify Christ in every possible way. He may have to stand before Nero, but Paul knew that he had to appear before a greater King than the emperor of Rome. **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ”** (2 Corinthians 5:10). This “earnest expectation” includes the salvation of the body at the end of the ages. **“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”** (Romans 8:19-23).

The prospect

The Philippians were earnestly praying for Paul’s release and he earnestly desired to serve the Lord no matter what was going to happen to him. “Earnest expectation” means “to gaze into the future with hope”, for the Greek

can be translated as 'expectation with uplifted head' – **“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh”** (Luke 21:28) and 'outstretched neck' – **“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God”** (Romans 8:19). Persecution, prison and the prospect of death did not weaken his faith or stop him glorifying God. While he hoped and prayed for release, he did not as yet know if it was the Lord's will for him to die there. **“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's”** (1 Corinthians 6:20). “Ashamed” refers to the fact that Paul had nothing to be ashamed of in his work for the Lord. **“As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed”** (Romans 9:33). His “boldness” is the very antithesis of shame and embarrassment.

Both his life and death were wrapped up in Christ, and either way, since he belonged to the Lord, he knew that he could not be separated from Him. **“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 8:38-39). “For me to live is Christ, to die is gain” is Paul's philosophy in a nutshell and is a good motto for all believers to have, because He can be magnified through our lives no matter what dire circumstances we find ourselves in. **“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”** (Galatians 2:20). “To die is gain” does not refer to the death of the body as such but, as the Greek implies, to the immediate state of existence after it.

The purpose

We should take time to understand the apostle's teaching here. For him, living meant completely committing his life as a living sacrifice to God. **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”** (Romans 12:1) rather than yielding to sin, **“Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God”** (Romans 6:13). He had given his whole life, every moment of it, to the service of Christ and was determined to reach as many souls as possible with the gospel of salvation. In other words, Paul had a purpose for living, and because of this he had a glorious view of death. **“For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's”** (Romans 14:8). Physical death held no fears for him because he knew that through it he would see his Saviour face to face. **“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”** (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Life is meaningless without Christ. Our lives are less than worthless if we do not follow Jesus the way we ought to, especially considering that the Holy Spirit enables believers to live above the hardships and terrors of the world.

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:37). Death? Well that is just a doorway into the presence of God, therefore “to die is gain” for the Christian that is living in the centre of His will. Like Paul, we can face an uncertain future with the courage only Christ can give us. **“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”** (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The predicament

If he was permitted to live, then Paul had already decided to keep on preaching the gospel. He was not going to spend his days worrying about the outcome of his trial, instead he was determined to glorify the Lord to the highest degree he could. “Wot not” is not ‘I cannot decide’ as some modern teachers would have us believe. He already knew that to be with Christ was gain, so he was convinced what the best choice was. “Depart” refers to being loosed from the confines, pains and limitations of the flesh. We may see something of his meaning here in 2 Timothy 4:6 where he writes, **“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand”**. In both cases it means ‘to loose anchor’ or ‘set sail’. Paul is simply stating that he did not know yet know what God’s will was on the matter, therefore he was leaving the choice up to Christ. His own desire was to be with the Lord, which was “far better”, for death would be a blessed release from all his suffering and pain. Notice that Paul did not believe the cultic doctrines of soul-sleep and purgatory, for how could the dormancy or the torment of the soul be more preferable to remaining alive?. The flesh (body) is only a temporary home for the soul and spirit. **“Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord”** (2 Corinthians 5:6-8) ... **“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”** (Acts 7:59). If we were given a choice to go to Heaven or stay on earth today, what would we choose? While we live let us be eager to live according God’s will. **“For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that”** (James 4:15).

Deep down Paul knew that it was best for the church that he remained alive a bit longer. He knew what was going to happen as soon as he passed away. **“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock”** (Acts 20:29). He would, after his release, ministered to people for **“two whole years in his own hired house”** and preached **“the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him”** (Acts 28:30-31), and would continue to spread the good news until the day he died.

Conclusion

We have to be impressed by Paul’s sacrificial service and selfless attitude in all of this. He was willing to ignore his very real problems for the sake of Christ and His church. No wonder he was a trailblazer for Christ. Sadly we see very few believers today who come even halfway to the measure of the Christianity

Paul lived and preached. Did God really mean for such faithfulness to die out when the apostle did?

Study 7

Christian Citizenship

“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me” (Philippians 1:27-30).

Introduction

The way a believer lives in this world will have an impact on how those who do not know Christ view the gospel. Christians ought to be known for standing for holiness and godliness rather than playing the hypocrite and compromising.

Our politics

“Conversation” has various meanings in Scripture and is usually translated as ‘manner of life’ or ‘behaviour’. In fact the Greek word ‘politeuesthe’ is where we derive our word ‘politics’ from. Therefore the gospel is our politics since it regulates the way we behave and conduct ourselves in society. Does our lifestyle “become” the gospel or bring shame upon it? We should live so as to bring glory and honour to the Lord. If we aim at being good citizens of Heaven, then we will both please God and shine for Him on earth. The Greek text implies that Christians ought to consistently live in a state of Heavenly awareness.

A great church is not known by its numbers, according to the Biblical estimation of things, but by its godly conduct while interacting with the world. It is interesting that Paul wrote these words to the Philippian church, for Philippi was known as ‘little Rome’ and was very proud to be a colony of the Roman Empire. Its officials expected every citizen to live for the emperor as much as they would if they lived in Rome itself. Their language, dress code, customs and religion reflected this in daily life. **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless**

we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:10-13).

No believer or church ought to bring dishonour to the cause of Christ by living opposite to God’s revealed word. If we profess the gospel then we ought to live worthy of it by conducting ourselves in righteousness and holiness. **“That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Titus 2:10) ... “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him ... Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness” (Colossians 3:10, 12-14).**

Our position

The local church must have unity, for like warriors facing a battle, we are to stand together for the gospel. We ought to unite against the enemy of truth rather than opposing each other. If we work against each other it only proves that we are not true friends of Christ. **“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18).** The devil’s tactic is to divide and conquer the church. **“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10) ... “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).** The essence of the “unity of the Spirit” consists in living in a worthy manner as we strive together for the Lord. **“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3).**

“Striving together” here and in 4:3 is a sporting term used to portray the exertion of contestants in a wrestling contest. Notice Paul exhorts believers to strive together rather than against each other. Our aim is to keep falsehood out of the church, which infers that we are to reject anything or anyone that tries to undermine the truth or our unity. We are to work as a team to defeat our common enemy and overcome all opposition. This demands discipline and co-operation. **“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude :3) ... “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Peter 5:8-9).** When a team member walks off the field or

seeks his own glory it is always at the expense of his fellow players, and in doing so is promoting the failure of all.

Our persecution

False teachers and earthly powers will try to intimidate us into compromising what we stand for. They will attempt to discredit the Lord, but we must continue to exalt Him all the more. If we stand for the truth we will encounter the wrath of Satan, so we like Paul will need God's strength to steadfastly preach and teach His word. Steadfastness is a vital element of our witness for Christ; otherwise the enemies of God will terrify us with their threats of imprisonment and persecution. All who oppose the gospel will spend eternity in Hell regretting what they have done.

Living for Christ has its consequences. Paul uses the Greek word 'agona' meaning 'to suffer' to show that the Christian life is not a bed of roses. The word was also used for the agony athletes endure to reach their goal. In 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul reminds us **"all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"**. Jesus prepared His followers for such opposition, **"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake"** (Matthew 24:9). Peter also states, **"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified ... Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf"** (1 Peter 4:12-14, 16).

Persecution is a sign that our persecutors have already lost and will eventually suffer defeat. Those who stand fast in times of trial prove themselves to be the Lord's faithful followers. Paul was a dynamic example of steadfastness in the face of persecution, therefore we do not need to lose faith when the battle rages. Our "contest" is for the prize only Christ can give. **"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us"** (Hebrews 12:1).

Conclusion

It is impossible for a church to steadfastly stand together in times of persecution if it does not abide in the unity of the faith. Unity is too great a blessing for us to miss out on. **"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore"** (Psalm 133).

Study 8

Christian Compassion

“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies. Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:1-2).

Introduction

The Philippian church was strong and had the vision to spread the gospel despite the dangers and problems that could otherwise destroy them. Though it possessed many godly virtues, strife and contention were festering under the surface. In this section of Paul's letter he diagnoses the cause and prescribes its cure.

Consolation

Firstly we notice the word “if”. Here Paul is saying that since there is so much to draw believers together in unity, any strife and contention ought to be easily eradicated. So rather than questioning if they had the virtues that follow, he is actually stating that they must use them to overcome any differences they might have.

“Consolation” – This word has several meanings in Scripture, but here it means ‘encouragement’, ‘exhortation’, and ‘comfort’. The Greek word is ‘paraklesis’ which is also used for **“The Comforter”**, that is, the Holy Spirit (John 15:26). Only those who believe have the indwelling presence of the Spirit and the comfort He brings. This comfort is not just to encourage us in our personal dilemmas, but it unites believers together also. The Holy Spirit unites the church rather than divides it. **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore”** (Psalm 133). Like David, we can find all the encouragement we need in the Lord. **“David encouraged himself in the LORD his God”** (1 Samuel 30:6).

Compassion

“Comfort of love” is the love that protects and prospers the church. It is the very foundation of Biblical unity. The Greek word is ‘agape’ which refers to the type of love that is Christ-like in nature since it is selfless and sacrificial. Notice in :2 that this love must be a united [“same”] love. **“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”** (John 13:34-35) ... **“Let love be without dissimulation”** (Romans 12:9) ... **“And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another”** (1 Thessalonians 3:12) ... **“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the**

Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).

We see then that there is a big difference between the words “consolation” and “comfort”. In fact the word is only used once in this sense in Scripture and expresses that it is a stimulating force. It means ‘to have great tenderness’ and ‘speak closely with’. God’s perfect love for us inspires us to unselfishly share it in word and deed with others.

Comradeship

Our fellowship together as a church can only exist if we are in partnership with the Holy Spirit. **“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”** (Romans 8:14). If we are indeed guided by the Holy Spirit the unavoidable consequence will be that we spread the love of God, for if it is in us, it will work through us. **“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”** (Romans 5:5).

This is evidence that we are truly indwelt by God’s Spirit. **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love ...”** (Galatians 5:22). Such evidence must be in both the individual believer and the church. He creates spiritual comradeship between believers while He fashions us to become more like Christ and bring Him glory. This joining together means that the church will share its blessings, needs and gifts; any discord that may arise is quickly resolved if we are in “one accord” and “in one mind” (:2). “One accord” reveals the need for perfect harmony amongst believers, for it was when the disciples met in this fashion that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. **“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place”** (Acts 2:1). It is interesting to note that the Greek word used for “accord” is only found in Philippians 2:2, and it literally means ‘a union of souls acting as one’. “One mind” means that we should ‘think the same thing’ regarding the purpose and plan of the church. Those who live in God’s Kingdom ought to drink from the same fountain.

Concern

“Bowels and mercies” describes the deep-seated affection that each member of the Body of Christ ought to have for each other. It is often translated as ‘tender mercies’. Can we imagine how many lost souls could be won for Christ, and how many weak saints would be walking in victory if the church displayed such heartfelt love and concern? This is the kind of love that yearns to see people saved and the church growing. **“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous”** (1 Peter 3:8). This affectionate bond cannot be excluded from true Christian fellowship, for we must all be concerned for each other’s welfare, temporal as well as spiritual.

Conclusion

There was obviously much about the Philippian church that thrilled the heart of Paul, but he wanted to experience overflowing joy by learning that any differences and disagreements were dealt with in accordance with true Christian love. He wanted them to survive as a church by faithfully serving the Lord and staying in unity with each other. Spiritual joy cannot exist in a

loveless vacuum or where grumbling, backbiting and criticism triumph. **“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”** (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Study 9

Spiritual Snobbery

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

Introduction

The world, in business, the media and even religion, tell us that we should think highly of ourselves “because [we are] worth it!” The majority are trying to be the brightest star in the sky, or at least pretend they are. Everybody is in search of the new ‘holy grail’ that is going to change their lives for ever, the ‘X-Factor’ that will elevate them to stardom. The Bible on the other hand is more down to earth in its estimation of man’s worth. **“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away”** (1 Peter 1:24) and **“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased”** (Luke 14:11). Whose nature is the world following anyway? Certainly not God’s! Satan once said, **“I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High”** (Isaiah 14:13-14), but he only got as high as **“the sides of the pit”** (Isaiah 14:15). That is where self-esteem lands people eventually.

Glory-seekers

The church has long been plagued by glory-seekers. This is probably the major problem with the televangelism, which promotes the man and his ministry rather than Christ. The local church can be hindered by those who crave attention, recognition and position. They remain pleasant only as long as they are being flattered, but woe betide us once the praise and honour stops being poured on them! Such people have no understanding of what humility is. **“Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD”** (Obadiah :4). They know nothing of being servants to Christ or His church. “Vainglory” is empty pride or being full of self-esteem. It is worthless boasting about oneself. The boaster thinks that he is better than everyone else, so we see there can be snobs in the church as well as in the world, but the spiritual kind are far the worse of the two. **“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father,**

but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). Such self-promotion is one of the main causes of disunity in the Body of Christ. It may not always be on a spiritual level though, for some believers try to impress others with their finery and fashion, and so hope to be held in high regard. Paul exhorts us not to **"be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another"** (Galatians 5:26) ... **"With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love"** (Ephesians 4:2) ... **"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering"** (Colossians 3:12). The world does not value humility anymore, instead self-centredness and self-promotion are held up as the ideal. True humility involves being conscious of our weaknesses and being disposed to ascribe credit to God. The world finds such a notion distasteful.

God-seekers

Now Paul offers us the remedy for self-pride. Humility is the best option for us at all times. In fact, even after we have done something we think is worthy of praise from God, we should instead say, **"We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do"** (Luke 17:10). Therefore we do not make a song and dance about it, put it in the church newsletter, or even hope to be noticed. The world may blow its own trumpet, but we calmly and quietly continue to seek and serve the Lord. Such meekness is not a sign of weakness, for there is nothing weak about humility. The world might not regard lowliness as a virtue, but Christ does. If we aim to walk in humility then we will know true unity, but if we walk in pride then disunity, divisiveness and defeat must follow. We will see in our next few studies that Christ chose the path of humility, so we who are His disciples are expected to imitate Him. Unity cannot exist where there is selfishness, vanity, haughtiness and self-interest.

All believers must live in humility towards God and others, even to the point of esteeming other people more important than themselves. **"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith"** (Romans 12:3). God's presence is with those who are humble. **"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones"** (Isaiah 57:15) ... **"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"** (Micah 6:8).

Grace-seekers

"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). The humble (lowly minded) will always be blessed with the grace of God, because they are keen to promote others rather than themselves. They do not draw attention to themselves but seek to bring honour and respect to other believers. They see others as better (more useful) than themselves. The word "others" is the key to this passage of Scripture. **"Be kindly affectioned one to another with**

brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:10). This “affection” can only be shared if we obey God’s rule here. **“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”** (Romans 12:3).

This is foreign to the human nature, so it can only be made possible through the power of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. As believers we must devote ourselves to serving others. **“If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all”** (Mark 9:57) ... **“Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all”** (Mark 10:44). It is this great grace that will dispel selfishness and strife in the church. A note of caution is needed here, for we ought not think that we must literally spend our days putting ourselves down or doing things to appear to be humble, for we will still be thinking about self and as a result our humility is really pride. Instead of this we must lay aside any desire to be noticed and simply serve people as though we were serving the Lord Himself.

Conclusion

The word of God is very clear regarding the need of humility in the church. We are only deceiving ourselves if we think that we can survive without it. **“Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits”** (Romans 12:16). Let us not be like Diotrephes, who was so full of himself and proud of his ministry, that he missed out on the blessing. **“I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not”** (3 John :9).

Study 10

The Mind of Christ

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Philippians 2:5-6).

Introduction

Philippi was a cosmopolitan city with various ethnic groups, so it was naturally difficult to forge unity in society, but the same problem ought not to be a hindrance to it in the church. **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:28).

It is not easy to change the way we think, for we spend much of our lives thinking only about ourselves, yet once we are born again everything is expected to be transformed by Christ; **“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”** (2 Corinthians 5:17). From that moment we are to think about

others rather than ourselves. Paul exalts Christ as the perfect example of humility, for the “Let this mind ...” in :5 is a bridge between :4 and :6. Here he explains in detail what it means to be Christ-minded.

The mind

It is so easy to slip into self-centredness and disturb the unity of the church, for the flesh to seek to concentrate on itself rather than lay any personal ambitions and desires aside. As believers we are to focus upon the Lord, His church and how to minister to the lost. **“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”** (Colossians 3:2). No wonder then Paul brings our attention to Christ as the prime example of humility by saying, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”. The story of Jesus washing His disciples’ feet is the Lord’s humility in action (see John 13:3-17).

What an awesome blessing it is to be able to have the mind of Christ? Yet it is impossible to have it without humility. The wonderful portrait of Jesus in the following verses reveal both His humility and humiliation. No one has ever humbled themselves to the level the Lord did, therefore He is the supreme example of selflessness, sacrifice and servanthood for us to follow. **“For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me”** (Romans 15:5). If we remind ourselves of what the apostle has already stated thus far we will begin to grasp why he desires us to have the mind of Christ. 1. Be likeminded; 2. Have the same love; 3. Be of one accord; 4. Be humble; 5. Put others first. This is the sure foundation for building unity in the local church.

The misunderstanding

There has been much misunderstanding regarding this passage of Scripture throughout the centuries. Those who hold to the ‘Kenosis Theory’, kenosis being the Greek word for ‘emptiness’. teach that Christ divested Himself of all divinity to become a man, but such a doctrine flies in the face of the fact that Jesus was literally **“God with us”** (Matthew 1:23). Jesus never for one moment stopped being the **“I AM”** (John 8:58, Exodus 3:14). Jesus Christ has always been God in nature, equal with the Father before, during and after His life on earth. Some modern versions of the Bible, such as the NIV, promote this cultic theory by translating Philippians 2:7 as ‘made Himself nothing’. We will look at this more fully in the next study. There have been a number of ‘Christian’ songs in the last few decades that have reintroduced the Kenosis teaching into the Church. This view was first introduced in the late 1800s in Germany with a Lutheran theologian named Gottfried Thomasius (1802-75). The Kenosis theory is a dangerous doctrine because if it were true then it would mean that Jesus Christ was not fully divine when He came to earth. If Jesus was not fully divine, then His atoning work was not sufficient to atone for the sins of the world. The correct doctrine is the Hypostatic Union which states that Jesus is both fully God and fully man and did not give up any divine attributes while as a man on earth. **“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”** (Colossians 2:9).

“Who being in the form of God” tells us who Jesus was before He came to earth, but notice Paul does not use the word ‘was’ but the precise word ‘being’ (Gk. Huparchon), which means ‘existing’. The word “form” (Gk. morphe) describes the permanent, unchanging essence of a person. If the

apostle wanted to describe Jesus less than divine he could have used the Greek word 'schema', which means 'appearance'. Since Christ's divine essence is not meant here, only the external manifestation of the characteristics of God were, for a time, laid down. The One who is "the form of God" willingly took **"the form of a servant"** (Philippians 2:7). Scripture reveals that He is God even though He took on human form to live amongst us. **"Who is the image of the invisible God"** (Colossians 1:15) ... **"Christ, who is the image of God"** (2 Corinthians 4:4) ... **"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 on the right hand of the Majesty on high"** (Hebrew 1:3).

The preincarnate Christ possessed every attribute of God. Heaven declared Him to be God and worshipped Him as such. He was not 'a god' of the Jehovah's Witness fairy tale, but the Almighty God of the Bible, that is Jehovah, the Sovereign Lord. Neither was He a man with 'divine qualities' but rather the Creator of the universe. **"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"** (Isaiah 7:14) ... **"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting"** (Micah 5:2) ... **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made"** (John 1:1-2) ... **"But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom"** (Hebrews 1:8). When occasion demanded the Lord Jesus Christ exercised His divine attributes.

"Robbery" (Gk. 'harpazo') means 'to take by force'. It is illustrative of a thief fiercely robbing someone. To rob someone is to take that which does not belong to you. Jesus did not grasp for or steal that which already belonged to Him. Paul in teaching that Jesus is equal with God is committing an unforgivable sin if it is not true. As a Pharisee he must have known what Isaiah 46:5 states, **"To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?"** Therefore we have no other choice but to accept the full divinity of Christ. Simply put, verse 6 tells us that that though Jesus was indeed **"God with us"** (Matthew 1:23), He did not exploit His divinity for personal advantage. **"I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God"** (John 10:30-33). For all their spiritual failings, the religious leaders did not misunderstand what Jesus said.

Conclusion

The writers of the New Testament took Jesus' divinity for granted rather than trying to prove it. The Lord Jesus Christ was not 'like' God, instead He was, and is, and always will be God. To fail to see Him as God in the flesh is to

misunderstand and corrupt the simple yet vital teachings of Scripture. **“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”** (Hebrews 13:8).

Study 11

The Humiliation of Christ

“But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7-8).

Introduction

It is sad to say, but nevertheless it is true, many believers have an unbiblical understanding regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. It is easy for false notions, if often stated, to become denominational traditions. This is no different when we come to the eternal divinity of the Saviour. There are those who teach that He did not become God’s Son until He was baptised of John, while others believe that He laid aside His divinity when He came to earth. Simply by reading what the Scriptures teach the fog of false doctrine is quickly blown away.

Voluntary humiliation

Firstly we must note that Paul writes that Jesus “made Himself of no reputation.” The Greek here indicates that He “emptied” Himself rather than ‘made Himself nothing’ as in some modern versions of the Bible. In the notes of the New International Version Disciple’s Study Bible we read, “That Christ took the role of a servant assumes that He forsook another role. His pre-existent life with God.” Such an interpretation is more a presumption than an assumption and is unsound theology in the light of Scripture. This ought to be considered very carefully, for it is the devil’s desire to undermine the true and eternal Lordship of Christ. There is no warrant to believe that Christ aside anything more than His heavenly glory (John 17:4), riches (2 Corinthians 8:9), and position (John 5:30, Hebrews 5:8). In coming to earth as a man to die on the cross for sinners He accepted a limitation to the use of His divine attributes (John 5:19, 8:28, 14:10). This was an act of obedience to the will of the Godhead. Notice Paul states that Jesus “became obedient” in this regards. The idea that His divinity was included in this emptying is both unsound and cultic in nature, for if He laid aside His divine nature and perfections, then Jesus was not omnipotent, holy and true. A part of this humiliation meant that He would have to suffer on our behalf. If He were only a man while on earth, then our salvation would not be complete. The sun, though at times hidden from view by an eclipse, constantly radiates its heat and light. Christ’s eternal nature was simply veiled by flesh. **“For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him”** (Isaiah 53:2). The ‘Transfiguration’ of

Jesus reveals that His preincarnate glory was veiled by the flesh while He was on earth. **“And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light”** (Matthew 17:2). Jesus assumed a body of flesh to come to earth, **“Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me”** (Hebrews 10:5). As such He was subject to the Law of Moses (Luke 2:21, Galatians 4:4), the will of his parents (Luke 2:51), temptation (Matthew 4:1-11) and the human needs (John 4:6, Matthew 8:24, Matthew 4:2, John 19:28). If He had appeared in all His divine glory there would not have been a soul left alive to tell the tale, for no man can look upon God and live (Exodus 33:20). **“Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see”** (1 Timothy 6:16).

The demons knew who Jesus was when He walked the earth. **“Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God”** (Mark 1:24). Satan knew who Jesus was or else why did he bother to tempt Him the way he did (see Matthew 4). In fact Jesus continued to humble Himself rather than demand His divine rights throughout His earthly life. **“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”** (Matthew 26:53). We must not forget Paul’s intended meaning here, which is, Christ humbled Himself and is the supreme example for us to emulate.

Christ was not forced into coming to save us; instead it was a voluntary act of love on His part. This voluntary humiliation includes the fact that Jesus, though God in the flesh, willingly became a servant. The servant was the lowest of all social classes. The Creator of Heaven and the universe stepped down from His Throne to become a slave and die for the sins of man. **“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:28). He, the **“KING OF KINGS”** (Revelation 19:16) was born in a lowly cattle shed (Luke 2:7). So we see that He became more than just a man, but took the concept of humility to a whole lot lower level. We are presented with many wonderful insights into the Lord’s servanthood in the Bible, but none more so than when He washed His disciple’s feet (John 13:4-17). The distance between His majesty and His humiliation cannot be measured or understood by our feeble minds, though it is vital that we grasp something of the significance of His humility and put it into practice in our daily lives. It is important to note that Jesus existed as much in the “form of God” as in the “form of a servant” for the duration of His life on earth.

Vicarious humiliation

Though Jesus was fully God, He took on the real likeness of man, though **“without sin”** (Hebrews 4:15). Neither was He pretending to be a man when He was “made in the likeness of men”, for the word “made” (Gk. genomai) means ‘to become’. The tense of the word has a definite time scale to it, thus it means that Christ becoming man was not what He was before and that the state would not be permanent. He was “found in fashion as a man” yet He was truly God. Scripture teaches, **“Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more”** (2 Corinthians 5:16).

Everything He did in coming to earth was voluntary, including His vicarious death on the cross, thus revealing that He did absolutely everything to save us. Nailed to the cross as a sacrifice for sin portrays to us the gory details of Christ utter and complete humiliation. He could have saved Himself (Luke 23:35), but chose not to preserve His own life. He allowed the very ones He came to save to kill Him, even though He did nothing to justify such hostility and wickedness. **“Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself”** (Hebrews 12:3) ... **“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not”** (Isaiah 53:3). Many men died on Roman crosses, but Jesus suffered the deepest form of humiliation possible. **“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God”** (1 Peter 3:18). He did this for us in obedience to His Father’s will. He willingly took the curse of all humanity upon Himself. **“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”** (Galatians 3:13) ... **“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Conclusion

We see here both the humility and the humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ, for no one has ever given up so much for us. Although He remained fully divine, Jesus took on a human nature with its temptations, humiliations and weaknesses. **“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”** (John 15:13). The climax of His obedience being His death on Calvary. **“No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father”** (John 10:18). In 1 Timothy 1:15 the apostle Paul encapsulates the gospel in a nutshell, for **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”**, and this marvellous act was both voluntary and vicarious. **“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth”** (Isaiah 53:7). No wonder then that **“There salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

Study 12

The Exaltation of Christ

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

Introduction

The “wherefore” in our text connects all that Paul has written before about the humility and humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ with His exaltation. What He suffered on our behalf is one of the reasons why the name of Jesus is above all names. **“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour”** (Hebrew 2:9) ... **“For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet”** (Psalm 8:5-6).

His laudation

Paul makes it abundantly clear that the name of Jesus is the most important name in Heaven, on Earth and in Hell. No other name holds such honour and glory because it is a name above all others. **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

“Every knee”, atheist, agnostic and heathen too, will have to bow before the **“Lord of glory”** (James 2:1, 1 Corinthians 2:8). They will freely acknowledge that He is the Almighty God, Creator, Sustainer, Messiah and Redeemer. Every member of those cults which deny His divinity will see Him “highly exalted” as He sits on His Throne as **“Lord of lords, and King of kings”** (Revelation 17:14). While they lived, they stripped Him of His divinity through their theology, but when they stand before the **“great white throne”** (Revelation 20:11), they will have no choice but to admit that He is **“the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords”** (1 Timothy 6:15).

Every man, woman and devil will kneel before the Lord Jesus Christ. “Every tongue” will declare that His name is **“Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”** (Isaiah 9:6). Sadly their confession of faith will be too late to save them. Everyone and everything will be under Him on that glorious day. **“Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”** (Ephesians 1:21). Salvation is only granted to those on earth who confess that He is Lord. At this moment the name of Jesus is used as a curse word and is dishonoured by evil men and false religion, but how devastating it is going to be for them when they appear before Him! **“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”** (Hebrews 9:27).

His Lordship

Some may argue that while all this is true regarding the Lord Jesus Christ, it would be a step too far to say that He is indeed God. They say that He may be Lord but that does not automatically mean He is divine. By simply reading Philippians 2:9-11 alongside Isaiah 45:22-23 such objections are blown clear out of the murky water of unsound theology. **“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”** If all will have to bow their knee and confess Christ as Lord, then it must mean that He is God.

The words “Jesus Christ is Lord” can have no other meaning than ‘Jesus Christ is Jehovah’. The apostle Paul knew exactly what he was doing when he quoted from Isaiah, therefore the text cannot be a reference to making Jesus personal Lord since “things under the earth” cannot do this, therefore it can only mean that He is Almighty God, the Supreme Ruler of all creation. “Things under the earth” include all the lost and the fallen angels, each must give Him homage even if it is only out of fear and terror rather than love. **“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble”** (James 2:19). We are presented with the fact that Jesus is the supreme Lord of Heaven and Earth. Something those in Hell acknowledge without question. **“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”** (Romans 14:11-12) ... **“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever”** (Revelation 5:13) ... **“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”** (Matthew 28:18).

There is a big difference in calling Jesus “Lord” and truly believing and living as though He is. Some think that saying Jesus is Lord means automatic salvation, but there is more to it than that. **“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved”** (Romans 10:9). There has to be true faith in the heart rather than using the words as a ticket to escape Hell, and how many only use His name as a kind of fire insurance! Only someone who has truly repented and has been drawn by the Holy Spirit can know Christ as Lord. **“Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost”** (1 Corinthians 12:3). The word “Lord” (Gk. ‘kurios’) means ‘owner’ and ‘master’. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew ‘Adonai’, which in turn is the name the Jews used as a substitute for ‘Jehovah’. The word is used in the New Testament for ‘God’, therefore to refuse Christ the fullest meaning of this name is to dishonour Him. Do we see why the cults and false religions never confess that Jesus is the Almighty God?

Conclusion

To confess the divinity of Jesus honours and brings glory to the Father, not to do so makes that person His enemy. Jesus is the focus of our worship and praise. We must acknowledge His Lordship and adore Him as Almighty God. One day all who have denied Him will declare themselves to be the biggest fools of all. **“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”** (Psalm 14:1).

Study 13

Working It Out

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13).

Introduction

This passage of Scripture explains the effects of saving grace in a believer's life. Though we are saved by the grace of God, salvation is evidenced by conduct that is righteous and godly. **“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:8-10). Therefore salvation was never meant to be a stagnant or complacent experience but instead the work of power that transforms the believer as he grows more and more like Christ. **“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10).

Working it out

“Work out” comes from the Greek word ‘katargazathe’ which means ‘to work to the finish’. The work that we are engaged in is never perfectly complete until it is completely perfect. While we do not promote ‘sinless perfection’, surely it is wrong for a believer to be happy with imperfections in his life! We ought to aim for such perfection as soon as we begin to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. How strange it is then that so many accept Christ as Saviour but will not follow Him as Lord!

No one can work it out on our behalf, nor has God promised to live the Christian life for us while we indulge ourselves in the world. Salvation is something we receive from God and live out personally by faith and obedience. We must be busy about the Lord's business. A huge section of the church are taught that once they accept Christ there is nothing that can rob them of salvation. They are taught that they can do as they please and God is obligated to receive them into His Holy Kingdom. To such people being ‘born again’ is the end of the matter whereas the Bible says it is only the beginning.

Only those who **“endure unto the end ... shall be saved”** (Matthew 24:13). To uphold the ‘once-saved-always-saved’ notion is to suggest that there is such a thing as halfway salvation in the plan of God. Some ‘Calvinistic Theologians’ suggest that Paul is simply asking the church in Philippi to work out their problems, but one has to sidestep the obvious meaning of the text to arrive at such an awkward interpretation. These teachers seem afraid of any mention of works being part of the Christian experience and thus play down their necessity. Salvation must be “worked out” through daily obedience.

“Fear and trembling”. This is not a call to slavish terror while obeying countless rules and regulations, but a wholesome caution not to involve ourselves in worldly practices that will make us the enemies of God. **“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”** (James 4:4). We must know the truth and live it. **“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”** (James 4:17). The Christian life is not a bed of roses, for trials and tribulations beset us while we travel the pathway of holiness. **“And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear”** (1 Peter 1:17). Maybe one of the reason why many Christians see no need to “work out” their “salvation with fear and trembling” is because they do not **“tremble”** at God’s word (Isaiah 66:2). Let us have that holy fear of falling short of God’s will for our lives. **“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it”** (Hebrews 4:1).

Here the Biblical doctrine of free will is clearly seen, for God does not “work out” our salvation for us, but instead gives us the means to put it into action in our daily lives. Only those who are determined to live godly have eternal life. In short **“faith without works is dead”** (James 2:20) and **“as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”** (James 2:26). We ought to fear and tremble at the thought denying or dishonouring the Lord in any way. **“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”** (Titus 2:11-12) ... **“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”** (1 Peter 1:7).

Working it in

We are called to work out what God works in. **“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”** (Hebrews 13:20-21). It is an undeniable truth that God’s grace is at work in every true believer’s life. The word “worketh” here is where we get the word ‘energise’ (Gk. ‘energon’). He stirs our hearts and motives us by His Holy Spirit to obey Him and to aim for complete salvation. It is at this point many refuse to listen to His voice. **“Wherefore (as the Holy**

Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7-8) ... **“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end”** (Hebrews 3:12-14).

Whatever God asks us to do, He also gives us the grace and power to perform it, but the choice to obey or not is freely ours to make. It must break God’s heart when He sees His people refusing to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. **“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”** (Romans 8:13-14). God never forces or compels us to do what we do not want to. Irresistible grace is a doctrine found elsewhere rather than in Scripture. **“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men”** (Titus 3:5-8). The work of God’s grace in us is always limited by our lack of faithfulness and cooperation. The desire and the action is ours. **“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”** (Colossians 3:1-2) ... **“But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him”** (1 John 2:27).

Conclusion

It should be a comfort to us to know that God is concerned about us and wants to be active in every aspect of our lives. This is the way we can truly glorify and honour Him. What would happen if Christians really did allow Jesus to be the **“author and finisher”** of their faith (Hebrews 12:2)? Not only would their own lives be transformed but they would also be an example for others. **“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power”** (Psalm 110:3) ... **“Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power”** (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

Study 14

Shining Lights

“Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:14-15).

Introduction

Within two brief verses the apostle Paul offers us a wealth of words of encouragement to goad us on in the Christian life. These are important truths, but if they are not visible in the believer's life, then how can he or she claim to be a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ? These truths are requirements rather than options.

Murmurings and disputings

The word for “murmurings” literally mean ‘complaining’ or ‘grumbling’ against each other as a result of selfishness. These two seeds produce the weeds of disunity and division within the church. Where they exist the climate for spiritual growth is radically diminished. Sad to say, there are churches where the members are constantly brawling and quarrelling, and usually over insignificant worldly things. They are at each others throats yet do not see that it is sheer pride and hypocrisy, the very opposite of a humble mind. The remedy for such division is peace and forgiveness. **“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you”** (Ephesians 4:31-32).

“Disputings” can be described as antagonistic questioning that come from a quarrelsome spirit. Not only is it spiritually and morally ugly, but also a sign of the heart's rebellion against God. Unfortunately some Christians habitually involve themselves in arguments that have no spiritual or eternal value. **“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him”** (Romans 14:1-3) ... **“For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults”** (2 Corinthians 12:20). Let us not forget that it was this sin that brought divine wrath upon the Jews in the wilderness. **“And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died”** (Numbers 21:5-6). “Disputings”

also refers to pointless arguments and discussions. This kind of 'debating society' was prevalent amongst the Aristotelian philosophers of Macedonia. How can we effectively be used of God if we are disunited and full of strife? Arguments and conflict will keep us from experiencing the grace and power of God in our lives, ministries, and fellowship. The local church cannot function correctly as the Body of Christ where disharmony exists.

Blameless and harmless

We have to be careful not to take any of these verses out of their context, for Paul's thesis here is that we must have the mind of Christ and walk in humility. God is working into us the very fuel that will enable us to shine brightly for Him in this sin-darkened world. If we fight and quarrel, then we are no different from the world and have no message to offer it.

"Blameless". No one ought to be given the opportunity of labelling a Christian as a hypocrite. There must never be a just cause for pointing the finger of blame at a child of God. **"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf"** (1 Peter 4:15-16). This strongly infers that we are to walk in purity and not engage ourselves in the same sinful activities as the world. The word "blameless" means to be 'faultless' and 'above reproach'. "Harmless". This word is married to "blameless" for obvious reasons, for it states the need for personal purity in our daily lives. It can be translated as 'unadulterated' and 'unmixed'. Once again we see that a believer must be sincere, honest, pure and above reproach. We must not pollute ourselves by living according to the world's standards of morality. **"For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil"** (Romans 16:19) ... **"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy"** (Jude :24).

Without rebuke

We know what the word "rebuke" means, but in this case it has the added meaning of being without 'blemish'. This means that no one should be able to find the slightest blemish [sin] in us and have cause to reject our testimony. Even the world speaks of an 'unblemished reputation', so the church ought to have a higher standard than even this. The word is derived from the Old Testament command about not offering blemished animals for sacrifice to God. **"Your lamb shall be without blemish"** (Exodus 12:5). Just as the priest under the Old Covenant could only offer unblemished sacrifices, so Christ, our Great High Priest of the New Covenant, will only bring the unblemished with Him into Heaven. **"That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish"** (Ephesians 5:27). The Bible emphasises the fact that the world we live in is **"faithless and perverse"** (Matthew 17:17, Acts 2:40). Its people hold wrong views on almost everything, have corrupt values, follow immoral ways, and reject the word of God. Therefore, though we live in a fallen world, we do not have to mimic it, but separate ourselves, be blameless and live above reproach in order to be true

witnesses of Christ. **“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”** (1 John 2:15-17).

Shine as lights

Paul makes it abundantly clear that the world is both “crooked” and “perverse”. These words basically mean the same thing, for the world is distorted, twisted, and morally and spiritual bankrupt. The world has completely turned away from the ways of God and has sold itself to Satan.

It is in this darkness we have been called to shine for the Lord! **“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”** (Matthew 5:14-16) ... **“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light”** (Ephesians 5:8) ... **“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation”** (1 Thessalonians 5:5-8). How can we truly shine the light of God’s grace into other people’s darkness if we are illuminated by the trashy light of the world rather than of Christ? **“If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”** (Matthew 6:23).

Conclusion

The opposite of what Paul writes here can hardly be called Christian. Where there is maliciousness and hatred the church shows itself to be reprobate and useless to God. Christ puts His mind, love and peace in our hearts and so equips us to be His faithful witnesses. **“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves”** (Matthew 10:16). Philippian society, as corrupt and ungodly as it was, was the place God had His lights of living testimony. It is no different for us today, for we too must blaze the gospel far and wide in our cities, nation and world.

Study 15

Upholding the Gospel

“Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:16-18).

Introduction

A part of working out our salvation is witnessing about the Lord to the lost. The apostle Paul takes the preaching and teaching of God’s word very seriously, for if the Philippians failed in this area, then he had not taught or encouraged them sufficiently. If they failed to testify of Christ, then he had failed in his ministry too.

Holding forth

The first six words of :16 make for an excellent motto for any church or individual Christian. We should have a desire to uphold the word of God in both word and practice. “Holding forth” literally means ‘to apply’ and carries the same idea from :15; therefore we ought to be light bearers who shine brightly with “the word of life” wherever we go. “The word of life” is also Christ living in and through us. **“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life”** (1 John 1:1). The purity of Scripture and its teaching relating to holiness and sanctification in daily life must be maintained, especially since we live in an ungodly world and amongst those who are not ashamed of twisting the word of God. It is tragic that instead of holding fast to the Bible and its principles for godly living, many Christians live so close to the world that they are totally ineffective as witnesses. We have been given the power to change the world rather than it having the power to change us. **“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”** (Acts 1:8) ... **“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15).

“The day of Christ” in this verse can only refer to the time when the church appears before Him as His bride. **“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”** (Ephesians 5:27). No preacher wants to see all his hard work wasted by believers backsliding and becoming apostates, instead he desires to see them standing before Christ as members of the pure church. This is why a true preacher will impress upon his hearers the need for faithfulness, holiness and separation from the world. The church is only kept on earth until “the day of Christ” so that it can minister to the lost. **“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say,**

Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

The church of Christ is obligated to “holding forth the word of life” the “gospel of Christ” which is **“the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth”** (Romans 1:16). The gospel is the “word of life” because by its very nature it transforms the lives of those whom it touches. But how can it touch them unless we hold it forth? **“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”** (Romans 10:14). The upholding of Scriptural truth must be done in both word and deed.

Sacrifice and service

Notice that Paul reintroduces the idea of personal sacrifice once again. He was willing to lay down his life for the Philippian church, that is, he would rather perish than see them being corrupted by false teaching or through strife. It was a joy to give himself for the spiritual welfare of the believers. The word “offered” also includes the thought of physical death, for the same word appears in 2 Timothy 4:6 where Paul writes, **“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand”**. The verse that follows reveals that he had upheld the gospel throughout his life and serves to illustrate Paul’s commitment to Christ and the church. **“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”** (2 Timothy 4:7). The word “offered” can be translated as “poured out”, which is interesting in light of what Paul previously wrote about Christ’s humiliation, **“He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”** (Philippians 2:8).

Sacrifice and service will forever be part of the believer’s responsibility while he lives on this earth. The Lord Jesus expects all those who follow Him to have this level of obedience. **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”** (Luke 9:23). Paul basically states the same thing in Romans 12:1-2, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”**. Such sacrifice and service is proof that the believer has truly committed himself wholly to the Lord. **“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”** (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Paul wanted the Philippian church to rejoice also. The believers there were excited about the preaching of God’s word and thus thrilled with the ministry of the apostle. They would soon rejoice when Paul was released from prison, for they would see him face to face again.

Conclusion

Even if he had to die in prison, Paul was content in the knowledge that he had done everything he could to help the Philippian church to live for the Lord. By “holding forth the word of life” we too will one day rejoice in the presence of Christ. It is going to take sacrifice, service and commitment in our lives if we are going to see the lost coming to the Lord. This means that it cannot be

accomplished if impurity or ungodliness reigns in our lives, otherwise we are nothing more than hypocrites, and those we cause to follow us are **“twofold more the child of hell”** than ourselves (Matthew 23:15). If we are ever going to live the Christian life we must do it the way that the Bible describes. If we are ever going to draw the lost to Christ then our method must be in accordance to what Scripture advocates.

Study 16

The Example of Timothy

“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly” (Philippians 2:19-24).

Introduction

This passage reveals that the apostle Paul had a pastor’s heart, for he was deeply concerned about all the members of and matters within the Philippian church. He chose the best man he knew for the job of leading and encouraging the believers in Philippi.

The genuine

Timothy was sent both to minister to the Philippians and to receive a firsthand report from them. Paul saw him as someone who was genuinely committed to the Lord and the welfare of God’s people. The word “naturally” means ‘genuine’ which infers that Timothy was without guile, selfishness or duplicity. His only motive was to serve God in all things. **“I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding”** (Jeremiah 3:15) ... **“I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD”** (Jeremiah 23:4). Timothy was the type of person God wants to see leading His local churches. **“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock”** (1 Peter 5:2-3).

No wonder then that Paul described Timothy as “likeminded”, for he had devoted himself to preaching, teaching and ministering to the believers. The margin of the Bible translates “likeminded” as “so dear to me”. He was Paul’s faithful companion and co-worker who was willing to serve rather than be served. This in itself proves that being in first place does not mean we are in the best position for God to use us. **“If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all”** (Mark 9:35). Timothy was, so to

speaking, obsessed with serving Christ. He possessed a kindred and brotherly spirit in caring for others, and in the apostle's eyes there was no one to equal him. High praise indeed! He was also an eager and obedient student of God's word (2 Timothy 3:15), a persevering and worthy servant of Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:2), a man of good reputation (1 Corinthians 4:17), genuinely concerned for others (Philippians 2:20), dependable (2 Timothy 4:9, 21) and devoted to Paul and the gospel (Romans 16:21).

Timothy was a valuable asset both to Paul and the church, for he had travelled extensively with him during his missionary journeys. He had previously accompanied Paul to Philippi (Acts 16), Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17), Corinth (Acts 18), Ephesus (Acts 19) and now to Rome (Colossians 1, Philippians 1). He also assisted the apostle with his letters to the Thessalonians, Colossians and Corinthians. Therefore Paul knew him well enough to know that he was a trustworthy, solid and uncompromising worker for the Lord.

The greedy

Like today there were many preachers and teachers that simply used the ministry to serve themselves and feather their own nests back in Paul's day. They certainly were not 'Timothys'. They were self-seekers who had no concept of self-sacrifice. They were ambitious self-promoters that were unconcerned with the growth of the church unless it brought in the revenue. They were all that Jesus warned His disciples not to be, **"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"** (Luke 12:15). The prophet Ezekiel describes all such prosperity promoting preachers exceedingly well, **"And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness"** (Ezekiel 33:31). No wonder then that Timothy was so special to Paul.

Regardless of what spin modern-day prosperity preachers put on their desire for wealth at the expense of the church, they are not true ministers of God, but are in fact false prophets. **"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works"** (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Notice how deeply the false teachers had dug themselves in, for Paul says, "All seek their own" rather than "the things which are Jesus Christ's". The word "all" should be seen as nothing more than a figure of speech, for we are reading of faithful Timothy and soon about another trustworthy man named Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30). This reveals that spiritual corruption had already gained a strong foothold in the early church. It is interesting to note that when Paul was incarcerated many forsook him, **"At my first answer no man stood with**

me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge” (2 Timothy 4:16), and one seemed to have hurt him the most, “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world ... At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge” (2 Timothy 4:10, 16). At best we could say that these other preachers had put Christ second in their lives, below themselves. Maybe they conveniently forgot that each one of us have to give an account of ourselves before the Judgement Seat. **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”** (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Conclusion

Though Paul was going to send Timothy to Philippi as his representative, his true desire was to be with the church himself. He wanted freedom from his chains so that he could personally minister the great truths of God’s word to them. He was awaiting the call to appear before Caesar, but he had a greater calling still and was eager to get back to it. Paul’s closing remarks once again reveals his belief that God still has work for him to do outside of the prison walls.

We need more like Timothy in the church today, for he is a great example of godly living. His life and ministry challenges our hearts to faithfulness. Are we willing to take a lower position and serve others the way God intended? **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 15:58) ... **“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier”** (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

Study 17

The Example of Epaphroditus

“Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me” (Philippians 2:25-30).

Introduction

Epaphroditus was a faithful member of the church in Philippi. When Paul was imprisoned in Rome Epaphroditus, whose name means 'poured out', willingly obeyed his leaders' wishes to travel there to minister to the apostle. It is also possible that he was a deacon in the church. He was obviously very brave as well as someone who dedicated his life wholly to the service of God, for a lesser man would have feared any attachment with someone facing capital punishment. It seems that he did not hesitate being associated with Paul, despite the fact that he could endanger himself as a direct consequence. In these few verses we learn something of the trustworthiness and example of Epaphroditus.

The soldier

Paul calls Epaphroditus a "fellovsoldier", but note also all five titles he gives him:-

1. Brother: Surely Paul would only say this of someone who was truly born of God. Notice that he does not say 'a brother' but "my brother". Once again, we see that these endearing words destroy the silly notions of some theologians who seek to portray Paul as strict and harsh, for here we see the tenderness of his spirit.

2. Companion: Serving God and ministering to the apostle was a labour of love for Epaphroditus. He was more than a mere friend of Paul, for he supported, encouraged and comforted him too. Anything that could cause a rift between them was seen as an abomination. He was willing to stand alongside Paul regardless of how severe the situation might be. He was no quitter or coward. **"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"** (John 15:13) ... **"A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"** (Proverbs 18:24).

3. Fellovsoldier: This must refer to his steadfastness and faithfulness in service. While many fair-weather friends forsook Paul in his hour of need (2 Timothy 4:16), Epaphroditus was not counted among them. He stood firm despite the obvious dangers. **"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier"** (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

4. Messenger: The word is derived from 'apostolos' which is clearly the root for 'apostle'. In the sense Paul uses it, it probably simply means 'ambassador' and 'representative', that is, someone sent on a special mission. Epaphroditus had a true calling of God on his life.

5. Minister: The Greek word 'leitourgon' has a precise meaning that is lost in the English translation. It was only used of great men who loved their city, culture and country. Paul is stating that this young man was an extraordinary person who was willing to go beyond the call of duty. **"But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all"** (Mark 10:43-44).

The sickness

While in Rome Epaphroditus became seriously ill to the point that everyone thought he was going to die. No doubt those in Rome and Philippi were praying for his recovery. He had the perfect opportunity to return home for no one would have criticised him if he did. But instead of being filled with self-pity, he was more worried that everyone was fretting over him. This is the measure of this remarkable young man, for not even a life-threatening sickness could cause him to quit.

Epaphroditus did return to Philippi, not to escape any dire circumstance, but instead to show his fellow believers that he had indeed fully recovered and was back in active service. Paul wanted any sadness in Philippi to be turned into joy, in fact, he was overjoyed at even the thought of the church rejoicing together over Epaphroditus' healing. It must be observed that the gift of healing was not a permanent anointing residing in any particular person in the early church or that such miracles always took place on a daily basis, otherwise Paul failed Epaphroditus by not ministering healing to him. This was also true of Trophimus whom Paul left sick in Miletum (2 Timothy 4:20). The modern notion of 'healing ministries' was unheard of in the first century church. Sickness and disease was healed according to the will of God and in answer to the prayer of faith rather than presumption. **“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him”** (James 5:14-15). Since none of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including healing, died out with the apostles, as some foolishly imply, we believe that God can still heal the sick today according to His sovereign will. **“The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will”** (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

“God has mercy” must refer to the fact that God directly intervened to restore Epaphroditus quickly to health, for the language here suggest a miraculous acts rather than a slow recovery.

The stature

Paul made certain that no mean-minded person had cause to question Epaphroditus about his faithfulness and service. He was being ordered back to Philippi rather than desiring to go. The phrase “hold such in reputation” means ‘to honour as a precious prize’. Paul explains why Epaphroditus had become so ill in the first place and the words “not regarding his own life” reveals this. The words come from a gambling term and indicated that he had taken a high-risk chance. This is not meant to put forward a negative view of Epaphroditus' sacrifice, but instead it shows that he staked his whole life for the ministry of Christ. Very few even in Paul's day were willing to do this. It is better to burn out for Christ than rust out.

“Not regarding his own life” can also mean ‘hazarding his life’. We may feel that Epaphroditus was foolish and unwise not to take time out to rest. Modern-day missionaries love their furloughs, preachers their sabbaticals and Churchgoers their retreats. The early church would mock us for such lukewarm attitudes and self-service. While it is Biblically acceptable to take time out to encourage ourselves in the presence of the Lord, it should never be because we feel that we deserve the rest. **“Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat”** (Mark 6:31). Epaphroditus’ sacrificial work was for the Kingdom of God. This is why Paul said that the church in Philippi should count it a privilege to stand in the presence of a true man of faith.

Conclusion

The Philippian church supported Paul’s ministry through giving and prayer, but Epaphroditus was willing to be right there with him in the work, not as a glory-seeker but as a servant. He is an excellent example of selfless sacrifice; something this letter is all about. He is a challenge to soft, easy-going and nominal Christianity. His life shows that the Christian life is difficult and demanding. It calls for faithfulness and commitment if we are going to emulate Epaphroditus. Remember that personal comfort is never praised in Scripture. **“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it”** (Luke 9:23-24) ... **“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts”** (Galatians 5:24) ... **“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ”** (Philippians 3:8).

Study 18

Rejoice in Christ Jesus

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:1-3).

Introduction

We understand that Paul had written the Philippians a previous letter dealing with similar themes, hence the reference to repetition in :1. It is also possible that he is simply encouraging them to continue rejoicing, for this letter mentions this need several times.

The rejoicers

This teaching about the need to rejoice is all the more pertinent since Paul is suffering in prison himself, so we are left with the understanding that no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, we can still praise and worship the Lord. It was in the Philippian's own city jail that both Paul and Silas "**sang praises unto God**" at midnight and almost brought the house down. This in turn led to the salvation of the jailor and his household (Acts 16:23-32).

Before we look at the false teachers mentioned in this passage, it does appear that Paul includes the theme of rejoicing to indicate the fact that those who truly worship God are unlikely to be led astray by falsehood or destroyed by difficult circumstances. "**True worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth**" (John 4:23). As we are confronted with the awful realities of everyday life, we can continue to rejoice in Christ rather than allow them to diminish our faith in Him. "**Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation**" (Habakkuk 3:17-18) ... "**For the joy of the LORD is your strength**" (Nehemiah 8:10). Life will never be free from trauma, tribulation or testing, but that does not mean we cannot walk in victory and praise. It is impossible to press on without worship and the knowledge that we are secure in Christ. "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord**" (Romans 8:35-39) ... "**Rejoice evermore**" (1 Thessalonians 5:16) ... "**Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy**" (1 Peter 4:12-13). The prophet Isaiah informs us that no matter our earthly lot we can still glorify God. "**The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel**" (Isaiah 29:19).

The rejecters

Paul now turns his attention to false teachers once again with the use of the word "beware" or 'have your eye upon'. This contrasts with "**mark**" (Philippians 3:17) in relation to following true men and women of God. Notice that he has nothing nice to say about those who seek to undermine the gospel of Christ, but instead uses some terms that modern-day compromisers would find too harsh. Paul lists three types of people that true believers need to avoid, but they can be simply referred to any kind false teacher. We have to be on our guard for such people are never far from gaining a foothold in the

church. False teachers are used by Satan to contaminate the purity of our faith.

1. Dogs. To call someone a dog was, and still is, a term to express utter contempt. We see then that Paul did not expect believers to entertain false teachers let alone unite with them. Isaiah viewed such teachers as “**dumb dogs**” (Isaiah 56:10-11). The Lord Jesus used a similar turn of phrase regarding those He considered to be opposed to the truth. He called them “**wolves**” (Matthew 7:15). The apostle Peter labels them as dogs and pigs (2 Peter 2:19-22) who are on the payroll of the “**roaring lion**” who “**walketh walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**” (1 Peter 5:8). All this proves that we are not here to debate theology with those who stand against the Scriptures but instead win souls by preaching the word of truth. These “dogs” are an abomination to God and will not enter Heaven unless they repent (Revelation 21:18).

2. Evil workers. This is probably means the same as “**deceitful workers**” found in 2 Corinthians 11:13. These descriptions of false teachers reveal that there is absolutely nothing good or commendable about them. In part Paul is referring to those who claim to preach the truth yet conveniently dismiss the doctrine of holiness and sanctification. Usually their lives are proof enough that they do not understand or have little regard for the righteousness of God. “Evil workers” also include those who teach a gospel of works rather than grace. We should not be surprised that there are “evil workers” in some of our pulpits today. “**And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works**” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). These people fail at a very important and vital point, for failure to study Scripture for what it says rather than approaching it with preconceived ideas always produces heretical doctrines. “**Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth**” (2 Timothy 2:15).

3. The concision. This refers to Judaisers (legalists) who believe that circumcision is necessary for salvation. The word literally means ‘mutilators’. “Concision” (Gk. ‘katatome’) is used in the Septuagint Version of Leviticus 21:5 and 1 Kings 18:28 uses the same word for the heathen practice of cutting the flesh to placate a false god. Paul is clearly writing about those who think and teach that Gentiles must practice various forms of the Jewish religion to be a true follower of Christ. They often keep the ‘holy days’ of Judaism, something we are warned not to do. “**Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain**” (Galatians 4:10-11). These people condemn themselves. “**For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God**” (Romans 10:3). Neither do they understand what they think they do. “**Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm**” (1 Timothy 1:7). The “concision” were the ‘Jewish Roots’ advocates of Paul’s day.

The righteous

Believers in Christ Jesus, Gentile or Jew, are the true circumcision, that is, they have been cut off from the flesh rather than flesh cut off them. It obvious that Paul is speaking of spiritual circumcision. **“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God”** (Romans 2:28-29) ... **“In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ ... Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all”** (Colossians 2:11, 3:11).

This is the reason our worship is not according to ritualistic laws and ceremonies but totally spiritual. **“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:24) ... **“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's”** (1 Corinthians 6:20). Let us not forget that Abraham's faith was sufficient to make him righteous centuries before the Law of Moses was implemented (Romans 4:9-10). No wonder then that we are called the children of Abraham rather than of Moses! True Christians do not put faith in religious practices, no matter how sanctified they appear to the flesh. Our confidence is in the finished work of Christ rather than unreachable Laws of Moses. **“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”** (John 1:17). Our worship is inspired by the Holy Spirit rather than ritualism or ceremony, for the latter are founded upon legalism. Biblical righteousness is of the heart and in the spirit and never according to rules and regulations. **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”** (Romans 12:1-2).

Conclusion

It is rather unfortunate that some 'Hebrew Roots' practitioners think of other Christians as second-class or void of spiritual understanding. They divide churches since their beliefs are opposite to what the Scriptures teach. They think of themselves, just as the Pharisees did, as superior and elevate themselves with their own brand of righteousness. We can rejoice in the fact that Jesus really and fully set us free. **“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free ... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”** (John 8:32, 36). We are a new creation in Christ. **“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”** (2 Corinthians 5:17) ... **“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature”** (Galatians 6:15).

Study 19

Counted the Loss

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Philippians 3:4-7).

Introduction

This section of the epistle to the Philippians offers us some great insights into what governed the life and ministry of Paul. Religion is man’s way of trying to please God; and because he knows that there is something wrong with his soul, he seeks to gain eternal life through good works and religious practices, yet he rejects God’s way of salvation through faith alone. Therefore the religious man can never be confident that his sins are forgiven or that he is fully accepted by God. He will speak of “hoping to go to Heaven.” All his effort to make himself acceptable to God is only as good as if he had done nothing at all, for they will land him in Hell at the end of his life.

Confidence

As we saw in our previous study a believer must not place any importance in or on the flesh, that is, all of our so-called accomplishments are futile if we think they have any merit with God. This includes all ceremonies, rituals and religious observances, for the flesh will brag about their worth and how particularly they are put into action. Now we read Paul’s feelings about his pre-Christian life and upbringing. He reveals that, despite his Jewish background and training, he did not understand God’s plan of salvation until he met Jesus Christ. With his immense knowledge of Judaism he had completely missed the point of what the Scriptures taught. His religion, with all its feasts, rules and duties failed to bring peace to his soul. Peace reigned in his soul the moment he accepted that Jesus was the Saviour. **“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Romans 5:1). His confidence was now in Christ rather than the religious efforts and works of the flesh.

If Paul achieved anything through his religious practices it was only the badge of self-righteousness. There were few men of that era that could have be elevated and put on a pedestal as a good example of what a good Jew was. Paul considered himself to be a spiritual person and had certain privileges simply because he was born a Jew. A brief list follows which he uses to reveal the areas where he thought he had it made with God.

Circumcision

Was Paul a real Jew because he was circumcised as a baby as the Law of Moses required? Circumcision proved that he was a member of the 'Covenant People' or in other words 'the elect of God.' He believed that this ceremony made him a true child of God. The religious churches have a similar notion; they think that infant baptism makes the child a Christian and dismiss what the Bible says on the issue. At his circumcision he was given the name Saul. This was a sign of his Jewish heritage, but it is possible that he was also called Paul at the same time because of his future interaction with the Greek world.

Culture

It is interesting that there are two Sauls mentioned in Scripture, though there are variations of the name, and both come from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest of the tribes of Israel. Was he named Saul in honour of Israel's first king?

He remained a true Hebrew despite the fact that his family moved to Tarsus, whereas many Jews 'Hellenised' by mixing their Jewishness with the culture of the Greeks. It seems that his family refused to do this but held firmly to their language and customs, nevertheless because of his interaction within that cosmopolitan city, Paul could speak Hebrew, Greek and Latin. He makes it abundantly clear that he saw himself as racially superior and religiously head and shoulders over everyone else. He considered himself to one of the elite and on that basis he thought that his salvation was secure.

Character

Now the apostle reviews his religious achievements. Paul used to be a Pharisee, the strictest sect with Judaism. The word 'Pharisee' means 'separated one.' He states this because he did not want anyone to connect him with the Sadducees, for they rejected huge portions of Scripture. We could call him a card-carrying Pharisee, an orthodox Jew. Even after his conversion Paul sought to distance himself from the Sadducees, whom he considered to be more heretical than the Pharisees. **"When Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both"** (Acts 23:6-8).

He considered himself to be zealous for God and thought that persecuting Christians pleased Him (Acts 8:3, Galatians 1:23). As the ringleader of the persecution he may have been zealous but he was hard-hearted with it. We read that he consented to the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1, 22:20), which literally means that he approved of it and took pleasure in the same. It was on one such campaign that he met the risen Lord Jesus as Saviour (Acts 22:2-21, 26:4-33, 1 Corinthians 15:8-10). **"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it"** (Galatians 1:13).

He thought of himself as righteous in the eyes of God, that is, utterly blameless. He lived and breathed his faith and aimed at being the best example of it. In reality he was simply trying to be ceremonially pure so that others would be impressed and call him a saint. He was immensely proud of his religion and education. **“And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers”** (Galatians 1:14). He was Judaism's star and would have become the leader of his sect if God had not intervened. Some commentators suggest the Paul had already become a member of the Sanhedrin, but it does at least appear that he was destined to occupy that position. The Lord Jesus had an altogether lower estimation of the righteousness of the Pharisees. **“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 5:20).

Conversion

Paul uses the words “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” to express his view that his pre-Christian life was now of no value. Do we see how the Lord Jesus not only took Paul's sin away, but all his boasting too? The word “loss” means ‘damage’. His old life was damaged and useless. Notice that Paul had a list of what he used to think were gains, but now he lumps them altogether as one big loss. God never repairs the old life but instead gives us a new one. **“I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God”** (Ezekiel 11:19-20) ... **“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”** (2 Corinthians 5:17). All the so-called glories of the past cannot be compared with what he had now in Christ.

Conclusion

After his Damascus Road experience Paul never allowed religious pride to hinder his relationship with Christ. His conversion was a radical transformation of his life and character. Now he sought to live a holy life God's way rather than through religious observances. **“Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”** (Hebrews 11:6).

In the next study we will continue with the apostle Paul's comparisons between his old life in Judaism and his new life in Christ.

Study 20

Counting the Loss

“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Philippians 3:8-11).

Introduction

The title for this study is very similar to the previous one, but as we shall see there is a very good reason for this. For Paul the Christian life was an ongoing rather than static experience. We notice that in :7 he said that he “counted” his pre-Christian life as loss, but now he says that he continues to “count” it so. The word “count” is in the present tense; therefore Paul’s decision to go all out for Christ was not an end in itself.

Renunciation

The believer’s greatest success in life is nothing compared to the excellency and glory of Jesus Christ, for what is the use of having everything yet not possess the life that He gives? **“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Matthew 16:26). Paul willingly renounced the world and its version of wisdom because he found that the knowledge of Christ was of the highest order. Religion, with all its regulations, cannot offer us the most important knowledge of all, which is the saving knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. It is a sign of sheer spiritual stupidity if a believer rejects the way of truth for the things of the world.

“Suffered the loss” does not infer that he found it difficult to give up his old way of life, instead it literally means that Paul purposely and wholeheartedly cast it away. **“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple”** (Luke 14:33). It was no more difficult for Paul to lay aside his pre-Christian experiences, position and knowledge than it was for the merchant in the parable of the ‘Pearl of Great Price’ to give up his riches (Matthew 13:45-46), for both found an even greater treasure. This is why Paul makes the obvious comparison between what he had then and what he has now. He continued to “count” his old life as “dung”. Valuable things can be lost, but since Paul sees no worth in his “loss”, he considers them valueless and should be forgotten. Remember that he had been educated by one of the greatest Jewish teachers in history, namely Gamaliel (Acts 5:34, 22:3), but now he considered even that as completely worthless compared with what he learned from his true Master, Christ. Paul counted his impeccable pedigree as absolutely worthless rubbish. The word

“dung” can be translated as ‘not fit for human consumption’ as well as the obvious meaning.

The use of the word “win” does not imply that obtaining salvation through personal means is possible, instead Paul is saying that he could not lose when he was born again, but in reality he won, at no expense of his own, the **“unsearchable riches of Christ”** (Ephesians 3:8). Again, just as with the merchant in the parable, it was a ‘no-brainer’. Surely the biggest loser is the one who holds onto the perishable when the everlasting is available. We “win” the “excellency of the knowledge of Christ”. True “knowledge of Christ” involves listening to His voice, following His Spirit, responding to His will and purposes for us, love and obedience, and identifying with what concerns Him.

Righteousness

“To be found in him”. What are we without Christ? Do we think that our own righteousness is acceptable to God? To be “in” Christ we must stand before Him without a trace of our own righteousness, goodness, or self-worth. It is a union and fellowship with Him that produces such righteousness; and this is what Biblical faith is all about. It is Christ’s righteousness, not ours, that makes us acceptable to God; therefore those who try to come any other way will be eternally disappointed. **“There is none righteous, no, not one”** (Romans 3:10) ... **“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”** (Isaiah 64:6). Paul was delivered from legal bondage into spiritual freedom and was instantly and thoroughly converted. He did not give up his unrighteous over a period of time.

True believers have the righteousness that only Jesus can give. **“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”** (2 Corinthians 5:21). The phrase “to be found in him” also indicates Paul’s great desire to be with Christ when his earthly life was over, something he knew was only possible if he continued to follow Him. **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”** (Luke 9:23).

Resurrection

The foundation of Biblical salvation is the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross. Those who respond to the message of the gospel must accept the vital truth, otherwise they will never have saving faith. This is the first step to truly knowing Christ as Saviour. If we do not “know” Christ at this point, then we will never have the certainty of new life in Him. How can we be real Christians if we do not have the transforming “power of his resurrection” reigning in our lives? **“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”** (Romans 6:4) ...

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5-6). These words clearly teach us that we are expected to live a new life in Christ. **“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God”** (Colossians 3:1). This power cannot be effective unless we daily experience and live it out. Resurrection life changes us, so no change means no salvation. **“And what**

is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:19-20).

“Fellowship of his sufferings”. Here Paul highlights Christ suffering for him, rather than his own sufferings for Christ. He understood that all he was going through paled into insignificance compared with all that the Lord endured to bring salvation to the lost. **“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”** (Romans 8:18). Suffering is never far from the Christian experience, but we must never let it rob us of our faith in Christ. **“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”** (1 Peter 2:21) ... **“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”** (Philippians 1:29). To share Christ’s sufferings demands self-denial on our part, which means that the flesh must be crucified, and that we must be willing to face any trial or tribulation in faith.

“To be made comformable unto his death”. This simply means that Paul fully committed himself to God and was willing to conform to His plan rather than having any dreams or aspirations of his own. His desire was to serve the Lord even if it cost him his life in the process. **“For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh”** (2 Corinthians 4:11) ... **“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”** (Galatians 2:20). As we daily serve the Lord we realise that there are areas of our lives that need to conform to His will. **“In Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily”** (1 Corinthians 15:31). Holding on to our stubborn will draw us into a backslidden state, or worse still, into apostasy. The self-righteous religionist knows nothing of this because he knows not Christ.

“If by any means” does not suggest that we can use any means to make our way to God, for there is in fact only one available to us. **“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6). This phrase expresses Paul’s desire to reign with Christ eternally, and reveals his confidence that he will see Christ face to face one day. This was his aim, his driving passion and the force of his life. Job said exactly the same thing using similar words, **“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me”** (Job 19:25-27).

Paul believed that the saved go directly to be with the Lord at death. In speaking of the resurrection in :11 it is likely that he has in mind the great resurrection at the end of the ages. This is the glorious day which will launch the events that bring in the New Heaven and New Earth. Christ will reign and suffering and shame will be no more (see John 5:28-29, 6:40, Acts 24:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, 2 Peter 3:10-13, Revelation 21:1). This “resurrection” includes the transformation of our earthly bodies (see 1 Corinthians 15:42-54, 2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

Conclusion

Renunciation, Righteousness and Resurrection are three areas of salvation that no believer can afford to be without. A Christian life without these will be extremely shallow and poor. If we truly want to “know” Christ then we must be willing to “suffer the loss” of our old life, have His “righteousness” and daily experience the “power of His resurrection”. This is how we can “know” we are “found in Him” and be assured of our future place in His Kingdom.

Study 21

The High Calling

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing” (Philippians 3:12-16).

Introduction

This is another of the most misunderstood and abused sections of Paul’s writings. Today many in the church think that there is no need to strive towards spiritual perfection as they believe that the Lord has already made them as perfect as they are going to be on earth. Their lives often show little evidence of such perfection. Some people in Paul’s day thought that he was claiming to be perfect, but it is clear from this text that he was stating the exact opposite. Nevertheless he does teach that God takes hold of the believer for a gloriously high purpose, that is, to bring him to perfection in Christ. Maybe the vision of glory had inspired Paul to reach beyond nominal Christianity towards the highest goal (2 Corinthians 12:4). He was determined to progress upwards until he reached the place he could see his Lord face to face.

None of us are spiritually perfect, yet we are called unto perfection. In the same way, because we are not physically or mentally perfect, we do not let that stop us from bettering ourselves either through exercise or education. We must follow Christ faithfully if we aim towards perfection in Him, nevertheless all true believers recognise their spiritual imperfections. **“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do”** (Romans 7:18-19).

Apprehended

Paul's desire was to follow Christ closely and continuously. He did not believe the notion of sudden perfection but that Christians ought to grow towards it as they live daily for the Lord. The words "follow after" mean 'to keep up the chase' and 'press on'. The same expression is found in 1 Corinthians 14:1, "**Follow after charity.**" Also in 1 Timothy 6:11-12 he writes, "**But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses**" These are things we have to do rather than having them automatically imputed to us. Why is it any different with perfection? Some have a problem with this, but surely we should follow God's purpose for our lives, not lukewarmly but in wholehearted service to Him! "Follow after" [Greek 'dioto] is an athletic term used in running sports, therefore it cannot be those who lazily meander through life. Paul was not complacent but eagerly desired to reach perfection. Sadly many Christians pull up short and will never reach the finishing post. "**Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?**" (Galatians 5:7). This can be quickly remedied though. "**Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us**" (Hebrews 12:1).

"Apprehend" is similar in meaning to 'attain'. Here it refers to something we must 'lay hold of' and 'seize' with a firm grip. Christ has firmly taken hold of us; therefore our grip on Him must not weaken. We ought to "**lay hold on eternal life**" (1 Timothy 6:12, 19) and "**lay hold upon the hope set before us**" (Hebrews 6:18). We no doubt have heard of a policeman apprehending a criminal after a chase. The word used by Paul has the same meaning.

While Paul knew that Christ had "apprehended" him, he realised that he had not "apprehended" the "high calling". In other words, he was not yet in the place he should be. He was as determined as a runner in an endurance race to reach his goal. He needed singleness of vision. He needed to "forget" everything from the past and focus upon Christ the "**forerunner**" (Hebrews 6:20). Let us not pass by the word "forget" without considering what it was he had to forget. In fact Paul has just reminded us of his old life in Judaism with its rituals and feasts, his heritage, his persecution of the church, and of his own personal suffering. None of these were permitted to hinder his service for God. The past needs to be forgotten, especially our human talents, abilities and achievements if we are to go on in the Lord.

Advancement

"Reaching forth" means to 'stretch forward' like a runner nearing the finishing line. Our aim is not to gain the advantage over our fellow runners, but simply to be the best Christian that ever lived. "**Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain**" (1 Corinthians 9:24). This is amplified by the words "press toward the mark". Paul pressed towards the goal, and wanted to be totally conformed to the perfection of Christ. "**For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren**" (Romans 8:29). Is it not strange that those who

stand firm for predestination ignore the need of conformation! Here is the “one thing” so many Christians turn a blind eye to.

It is impossible to advance towards perfection unless we are **“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”** (Hebrews 12:2). Looking back, like Lot’s wife (Genesis 19:27, Luke 17:32), will end with going back and making ourselves unfit for the Kingdom of God. **“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”** (Luke 9:62). We must **“Strive to enter in at the strait gate”** for as Jesus says, **“many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able”** (Luke 13:24). The apostle Peter write exactly the same thing, **“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”** (1 Peter 1:13-16.). God always wants His people to **“go forward”** (Exodus 14:25). God continues to stir up our hearts to reveal where we are falling short, and His Holy Spirit convicts us of the need to be more like Christ in our daily lives. **“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”** (Colossians 1:28) ... **“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God”** (Hebrews 6:1).

The “mark” is Christ for He stands at the finishing post to welcome us home, and the “prize” is the **“crown of life”** to those who finish the course (James 1:12). Therefore the “prize” is not the “high calling” but the end result of it. **“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”** (2 Timothy 4:7-8). How few run well! **“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain”** (1 Corinthians 9:24).

Ascending

Our Christian lives must be in accordance with the “high calling” or ‘the calling from above’. In reality the devil has convinced preachers and their adherents to set an altogether lower standard of godliness. The calling is “high” because it is ‘upward’ not downward. Those who are always backsliding have to question their commitment to Christ. A part of growing towards perfection is maintaining that which we have already achieved in Christ. Trying to ascend in faith without holiness and sanctification is like a bird with no wings attempting to fly. We need to be disciplined enough to resist all hindrances to our growth. **“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us”** (Hebrews 12:1). It must be noted that Paul is also rebuking the ‘perfectionists’ of his day, for the word “perfect” in verse 15 means ‘to be mature’ rather than achieving a state of sinless or spiritual perfection. This word can also mean ‘fully fit to run’, that is, according to the principles laid

down in Scripture. There are those who believe that they have reached a state of perfection, but in truth they are deceiving themselves.

Conclusion

There will always be those who cling to the idea that they have already achieved the state of perfection either through imputation or good works, but God has ways to reveal just how wrong they are. There will always be those who suggest that absolute perfection is impossible on this side of eternity, so it is not worth trying. How will they ever receive the “prize” for following the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus”? Are they truly walking “**in the Spirit**” or fulfilling the “**lust of the flesh**” (Galatians 5:16)? Those who claim to follow Christ ought to live according to truth found in 1 John 2:6, “**He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked**”, otherwise they are fooling themselves. “**See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil**” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

What level of perfection do we think we have advanced to? The spiritual determination that has brought us thus far will drive us forward, onward and upward in our relationship with Christ. It is not our willpower, but the power of the Holy Spirit who enables obedient Christians to aim higher towards perfection. Let us never stop pressing on.

Study22

Enemies of the Cross

“**Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things**” (Philippians 3:17-19).

Introduction

What example do we set before the world, family and friends? The way we conduct our lives has an influence on what others think of Christ. We are being watched, so we need to make sure that our lives are a pattern that others can follow.

Ensamples

“Followers” is often translated as ‘imitators’. Paul, whose desire was to please the Lord in every way, suggests that we ought to follow the same rule, which is, to aim high in our service for God. He offers himself as an example to follow in the same way a father is meant to be for his offspring. “**Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children**” (Ephesians 5:1). The fact that Paul was a man of intense feeling and passionate about Christ, is one of the keys to why the Lord used him so mightily. “**My zeal hath consumed me,**

because mine enemies have forgotten thy words” (Psalm 119:139). “Mark” means ‘to take aim at’ as if we were shooting an arrow at a target. In the criminal world a ‘mark’ is the person a thief has chosen to follow with the intention of stealing from him. There are many godly examples of good Christian living in Scriptures and throughout history, so we are not left without a “mark”. **“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”** (1 Corinthians 11:1). Those in leadership are meant to be **“ensamples to the flock”** (1 Peter 5:3) in every way. How sad it is then that some pastors lead their people on drinking sprees or put on ‘Elvis Nights’ to entertain them! No wonder those in leadership will receive **“greater judgement”** (James 3:1). There is no problem with us copying a true Christian’s godly lifestyle. The Lord does not mind how many come out of those moulds! Modern translations of the Bible often use the word ‘example’, though it is not quite what Paul intended to relay to his readers here. The word “ensample” [Greek ‘tupon’] refers either to an imprint left after something has been pressed into a clay mould or a bruise left by a boxer on his opponent. Therefore, those who follow Jesus should leave a deep and lasting impression on others. Are we dynamic examples of Christianity? **“Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”** (1 Timothy 4:12) ... **“In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you”** (Titus 2:7-8).

Enemies

Notice Paul uses the word “walk” in references to the “enemies of the cross” to show that there are those who claim to be real Christians but are not. Sadly the church’s greatest enemies are often found on the inside, the professed believers who corrupt the gospel through immoral living and false teaching. Many such “enemies” have infiltrated the body to spread evil doctrines. **“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not”** (2 Peter 2:1-3). Their “pernicious ways” include all the foolish and worldly activities that are common in many churches today. These people are compromisers who water-down and pervert the gospel to get others to follow them. **“Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ”** (Galatians 1:7). Paul wept over this topic, for it gave him no joy to have to warn the churches about false teachers and their evil doctrines. **“Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law”** (Psalm 119:136). While it is important that we follow godly examples, we must avoid anyone that does not live according to Scripture.

In exactly the same way as Peter does, Paul makes it clear that these false brethren are doomed, meaning that they are not saved. Notice that he uses the word “destruction” rather than condemnation, for it is a sentence that will

be carried out by the Great Judge. They are the “enemies of the cross” because they preach an unscriptural version of salvation. There are three basic erroneous doctrines about salvation: 1) God forces someone to get saved against their will; 2) Good works will win salvation; 3) God will not send anyone to Hell – all will be saved. God never condones false doctrines, especially when they directly affect someone’s understanding of salvation, for each one denies the efficiency of the Cross of Christ. “Destruction” therefore is the only just end for those who deny Christ in this fashion. **“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal”** (Matthew 25:46) ... **“But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile”** (Romans 2:8-9) ... **“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”** (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Such people will be considered worthless and unworthy to enter the Kingdom of God.

Paul adds a final word of condemnation on these false believers in the church. He says that they have no other god but their bellies, that is, their appetites and desires. Their lives are centred on fleshly things rather than spiritual. They are worldly and selfish. They are gluttons for the world but starve themselves of the word of God. Paul may have had in mind ‘Cyclops in Euripides (c. 480 – 406 B.C.) when he wrote that their “God is their belly”. The Greek playwright puts in the mouth of the one-eyed ogre, “I sacrifice to no god save myself — And to my belly, greatest of deities”. No doubt we can see the so-called ‘Health and Wealth’ advocates here too. Simply put, they are involved in Christianity for what they can get out of it for themselves. No wonder they are likened to the greedy one-eyed monster, especially since they have the audacity to call themselves ‘gods’. **“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple”** (Romans 16:17-18).

“Whose glory is their shame”. If these people glorify anything, it is not the Lord. In fact they make sure that everyone knows that they live by their own interpretation of what the Bible says. They have no qualms about living outside of the clear teachings of Scripture, and they are thrilled that others notice how ‘with it’ and ‘up to date’ they are. They are an offence to righteousness and godliness. **“For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts”** (Psalm 10:3-4). They have a one-track “mind” for worldly things. **“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady,**

highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Conclusion

The apostle Paul did not view the “enemies of the cross” as wayward brethren but as “evil workers” (Philippians 3:2) who are damning their souls to a lost eternity. He did not allow them to influence those who were truly seeking the Lord or turn a blind eye to their doctrines or activities. He would be dumbfounded at the modern Christian couplet regarding false teachers which states, ‘Chew the meat but spit out the bones’. Those who say such things do not love the Lord or His word enough. His rebuke of them reveals that he did not count them as the friends of Christ. He also understood that the flesh is attracted by glitzy, entertaining and shallow showmen in the church, so he encourages believers to find godly people they can follow and use as a pattern for their lives. Paul would agree with Peter that the absolute best example is Christ Himself. **“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”** (1 Peter 2:21).

Study 23

Look away to Jesus

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

Introduction

The believers raise his point of vision from off the earth to the highest Heaven. While the lost and the compromiser “mind earthly things” (Philippians 3:19), true Christians must **“look up”** (Luke 21:28) and **“Set”** their **“affection on things above, not on things on the earth”** (Colossians 3:2). We have a glorious eternal future ahead of us if we live according to God’s standards of righteousness rather than the corrupted version of the modern church.

Conversation

The word “conversion” here has a similar meaning to that found in Philippians 1:27. Here it simply refers to ‘citizenship’ and indicates that a Christian ought to be a Heavenly-minded person. We are no longer citizens of earth but of Heaven – the Kingdom of God. We have become foreigners and travellers on this earth (Hebrews 11:13), but God **“hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:6), Just as we might guess at someone’s nationality by their customs, dress and lifestyle, so the world ought to notice that we are different and that we conduct

ourselves as God's children should. Jesus said in John 15:19 that we no longer belong to this world, **"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you"**. Why is this? The answer is simple, it is because we are **"born from above"** (John 3:3 margin). Some old translations of the Bible use the word 'city' instead of "conversation" but this does not change the meaning of the text in Philippians 3:20, and confirmed by Hebrews 11:16, **"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city"**.

Christ

Christians eagerly await the soon coming return of the "Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ". The New Testament and many prophecies of the Old clearly reveal that the Lord Jesus is coming back to this earth one day. Therefore we are to focus our lives around this glorious thought, for those who are anticipating Christ's return will not be captivated by the world. We "look" for the "Lord" to come. There are numerous texts that speak of the divinity of Christ Jesus, but here Paul uses the word "Lord" as an alternative to 'Jehovah'. The Jesus we know is literally Jehovah. Those who reject this truth can never have eternal life with Him. Did He not give us a definite promise about this? **"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"** (John 14:2-3).

When a monarch or some other dignitary announces a visit to a city, the people there make great preparations for his or her arrival. Nothing is left to chance or put off until the last minute. How sad it is then that so little preparation is made for the coming of the **"KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS"** (Revelation 19:16)? The word "look", though only consisting of four letters in English, is made up from three other words in Greek. 1. 'Receive' or welcome with joy and celebration, 2. 'Off', meaning to forget about everything else that might otherwise detain us, 3. 'Out' or have one's neck stretched out to see the important personage. When combined these three words fully describe the true meaning of the word "look" in Philippians 3:20 and reveal that we ought to yearn for the return of Christ. **"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh"** (Matthew 24:44) ... **"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works"** (Titus 2:13-14) ... **"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation"** (Hebrews 9:28).

Change

Our earthly bodies are going to go through a complete transformation when we are called into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. **"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body"** (2 Corinthians 4:10). Paul says that

our earthly bodies are “vile”. Some might object to this thought, but the very fact there is a cosmetics industry is proof enough that beauty is not ‘skin deep’ but plastered on. The same could be said of the fashion industry, for everyone is looking for that one piece of clothing that sets them apart from everyone else. It is all because we are not happy with what we see in the mirror until we spread it on and dress it up. Paul’s meaning includes the idea that the flesh is ‘worthless and death-filled’.

We all need to make changes in our lives, but adding more to our skin is not the answer. In fact only Jesus make quality additions to us, thus making us fit for Heaven. **“Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”** (1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

Our bodies of flesh are going to be permanently transformed. The word “fashioned” [Greek ‘summorphon’] indicates a complete, once-for-all-time change. **“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness”** (Psalm 17:15) ... **“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you”** (Romans 8:11). There will be no stores selling cosmetics in Heaven, for our new body will be made “glorious”. Notice that there is nothing we can do to achieve this state, since it is the “working” of Christ. “Working” [Greek ‘energia’] refers to the ‘creative energy’ of the Lord Jesus. The Midrash, a Jewish work, states that “the holy blessed God will beautify the bodies of the righteous in future time, like the beauty of Adam”, but in fact our new bodies will be designed after the beauty of Christ.

Conclusion

Paul has briefly described the final part of the salvation process. Scripture teaches that salvation was only the being of the work of God in our lives and that it will not be completed until Christ returns or we are received into His presence. **“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”** (Philippians 1:6). Therefore we have been born again (saved), we are being renewed day by day as we follow the Holy Spirit, and one day we will receive a resurrection body that can never deteriorate or die. Thank God that He is **“able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him”** (Hebrews 7:25), He is **“able to keep [us] from falling, and to present [us] faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”** (Jude :24), and that **“this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death”** (Psalm 48:14). Our daily focus therefore ought to be on the Lord. Let us continuously look away to Jesus. **“Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus”** (Revelation 22:20).

Study 24

Six Requirements for Spiritual Peace (part 1)

“Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:1-4).

Introduction

The main aim of this portion of the letter to the Philippians (4:1-9) is the peace of God in the life of the believer. Paul literally yearned for [“longed for”] the Philippian believers. He desired to see them continuing to stand strong in Christ. This would be his crowning glory in Heaven. **“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy”** (1 Corinthians 2:19-20). Paul reveals six requirements that must be in place if we are to truly experience this peace. He also helps us to understand how this peace is maintained.

Requirement 1: Standing fast

Paul has already encouraged his readers to **“stand fast”** (1:27). Here it seems to refer to the areas he is about to point out, but mainly it is dealing with unity and faithfulness. The term “stand fast” is derived from the Greek word ‘stekete’ and describes a soldier refusing to desert his post even in the heat of a fierce battle. For us therefore it means that we must continue to stand firm and defend the truth at any cost. Many, just as in Paul’s day, are defecting to false religious practices and teachings, and quickly brought into bondage. **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”** (Galatians 5:1). So we see why standing fast is the first requirement in the list. **“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong”** (1 Corinthians 16:13).

The word also includes the idea of persistence and perseverance in the Christian life. No matter how strong, mighty or seemingly intelligent the enemy of truth may appear to be, we must not budge one iota from God’s word. We cannot resist in our own strength though, for it takes the power of the Holy Spirit rather than will power. We must continue to live for Christ in all of life’s situations remembering that His peace is available to us at all times. **“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”** (Philippians 4:6). Every thought, action and word must line up with Scripture or else it is impossible to “stand fast”. **“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”** (2 Corinthians 10:5). In other words, we must be true to whatever the Bible teaches. **“Therefore,**

brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Requirement 2: Unity

Euodias and Syntyche were ladies, maybe deaconesses, who held meetings in their homes. These two ladies were possibly amongst **“the women which resorted”** to the riverside at the time of prayer (Acts 16:13), and therefore were the earliest converts in Philippi. Paul appears to be reprimanding them for some rivalry and unfriendliness that existed between them. For whatever reason, they were not seeing eye-to-eye, so the apostle encourages them to be at peace with each other in the Lord. It is possible that these two women were the main culprits of the strife that was undermining the unity of the Philippian church. God was obviously using them, while backbiting and grumbling was unravelling all the good they had accomplished. It is a fact that there has always been more women than men in the church throughout its history. They were willing to pay the price of faithfulness to the Lord. This is especially remarkable in light of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ never chose a woman to be one of His disciples.

We do not know who the “yokefellow” was, but must have been a faithful leader in the church and someone all sides respected. The word ‘yoke’ is significant here, for the device brings two individuals together for a common task. This elder then had the grace and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to unite the quarrelling women. Through his spiritual insight and godly counsel he would bring reconciliation to the pair. **“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”** (Galatians 6:1-2). There were others actively trying to encourage peace in the fellowship. Clement is named as one who could be trusted with leading the church members in righteousness. Each one was working with Paul to eradicate bickering and fighting from their midst so that the peace of God might reign. Paul’s mention of “the book of life” is significant here, for Philippi, as in many Roman cities, had a book containing the names of all its important and wealthy citizens. Therefore God knew about the many nameless people who faithfully laboured for the sake of the gospel. **“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”** (Revelation 3:5).

Requirement 3: Rejoice

The short statement found in verse four has been the source of many a sermon and word of encouragement. At all times and in every circumstance we can rejoice in the Lord. We ought to be able to do this since Christ is with us at all times and in every circumstance. **“For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”** (Hebrews 13:5) ... **“Lo, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”** (Matthew 28:20).

Why do we stop rejoicing in the Lord just because bad times make an appearance in our lives? Of all people we ought to be filled with praise, thanksgiving and worship despite our troubles. **“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive**

shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places” (Habakkuk 3:17-19) ... **“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy”** (1 Peter 4:13) ... **“Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer”** (Romans 12:12). We have much to rejoice in. **“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's”** (Psalm 103:1-5). Our faith can be strengthened as we call to mind the grace, love, compassion, and blessings that God pours into our lives.

Is Paul saying that rejoicing in the Lord is a part of the remedy for grumbling and complaining? If he is not, then this text seems to sit uncomfortably in the passage. To rejoice in God means that we focus our attention upon Him and allow silly differences and quarrels to fade away in His presence. While rejoicing is not the complete answer, it does at least help in drawing people together in fellowship. **“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together”** (Psalm 34:1-3). Let us indeed **“rejoice evermore”** (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

Conclusion

The words “dearly beloved”, “longed for” and “my joy and crown” reveal just how deeply Paul felt about the believers in Philippi. He wanted them to be true examples of what pure Christianity was all about. In his affection for them he also felt every problem they faced. Standing fast, unity and rejoicing are the first of the six requirements Paul mentions in relation to knowing the peace of God in our lives. We can already see how important these three areas are to the well-being of the church.

Study 25

Six Requirements for Spiritual Peace (part 2)

“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:5-7).

Introduction

In this section of ‘Six Requirements for Spiritual Peace’ we will look at two subjects, “moderation” and “prayer”. How we live and behave ourselves in this world will impact upon our prayer lives, and visa versa. With this in mind we will clearly see that “moderation” and “prayer” compliment each other.

Requirement 4: Moderation

The English word is defined as ‘The avoidance of excess or extremes’ (Wikipedia), but the Bible has a higher meaning for ‘to be reasonable’ and ‘to be gentle’. So while ‘moderation’ is dealing with conduct, it is not referring to temperance as such, but it speaks of the need to be godly in our interaction with other people. The basic meaning describes the need of gentleness and patience. Translators of the Bible have always found it difficult to give a precise meaning to the Greek word, but most insist that it means ‘to be gentle’ and is the opposite to anger and resentment. We could say that it is not ‘Christian’ to be offhand or inconsiderate with anyone. Notice that Paul adds the words “all men” to indicate that we ought to behave in a godly fashion with those within and outside the church. We cannot avoid interacting with unbelievers, but we must be careful to draw them to Christ rather than repulse them with our behaviour. **“To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men”** (Titus 3:2) ... **“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will”** (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

“The Lord is at hand” may simply mean that God is observing everything we do, but it also suggests, which seems more likely, that it is referring to the Second Coming of Christ. Also, it might be a combination of both ideas, for the phrase is similar to **“maranatha”** (1 Corinthians 16:22), meaning that the Lord Judge is coming soon to punish all wrongdoing. **“Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door”** (James 5:8-9). All believers should live as though Christ was coming today, and as a consequence behave godly before “all men”. Therefore he is saying that since Christ sees and hears everything we do and say, our daily lives ought to be holy and righteous. **“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer”** (1

Peter 4:7). How would we behave if we truly believed that the presence of God was with us? Would we act or speak ungodly if we could literally see the Lord walking with us? This would change many churches for the better if members adopted this pattern of living. The majority of our problems with others would be solved if we sought to honour Christ rather than seeking to outdo or belittle one another. Can we see how 'moderation' is a requirement for peace?

Requirement 5: Prayer

There are several issues that relate to prayer in verse six, each of which deserves its own study, but here we will deal with them briefly. How can we know the peace of God in our lives if we do not pray?

As Christians, who claim to trust in the Lord, there is no need for us to be overcome with fear, worry or anxiety. If we do find ourselves fretting over something, we can turn it over to the Lord in prayer and find the needed peace, for prayer is the essential remedy for worry. **“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”** (1 Peter 5:7) ... **“Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved”** (Psalm 55:22) ... **“Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established”** (Proverbs 16:3) ... **“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?”** (Matthew 6:25). Prayer is always the remedy for worry, for the time we spend in worrying can be better spent in prayer. Worry brings defeat whereas prayer brings victory and peace into our hearts. To pray over our problems reveals that we love the Lord enough to trust Him. **“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love”** (1 John 4:18). Worry and anxiety cannot take away tomorrow's troubles, but they will rob us of today's peace.

“Supplication” is the type of praying that focuses upon special needs and is directly connected to “requests” for specific things. We can pray about everything no matter how insignificant it may appear, for God is interested in every aspect of our daily lives, even to the minutest detail. **“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you”** (Matthew 7:7) ... **“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint”** (Luke 18:1) ... **“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”** (Ephesians 6:18).

A part of prayer includes “thanksgiving”. Are we thankful for all that the Lord has done for us? If we thought about what the Lord has already accomplished for us, we would assure our hearts that He will always be there for us in the future. **“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”** (1 Thessalonians 5:18) ... **“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms”** (James 5:13).

Conclusion

By way of conclusion to this study we will note Paul's discussion on “peace”. Each of us needs the peace that only God can give us, and He desires to flood our lives with it. **“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful”** (Colossians

3:15). The Greek word 'eirene', often translated 'peace' literally means 'to be bound together with an unbreakable knot'. This wonderful definition explains Paul's inclusion of it in this letter. Not only does it describe the assurance and security we have in Christ, but it also refers to the much needed oneness in the body of Christ. **"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"** (Romans 8:15-16) ... **"Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"** (2 Timothy 2:22) ... **"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"** (Hebrews 12:14).

This peace is only possible if the **"Prince of Peace"** is abiding with us (Isaiah 9:6). **"Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all"** (2 Thessalonians 3:16). If He is, then this mind-blowing peace will "keep" our "hearts and minds". The word "keep" describes a fortification that guards against attack. It reveals that God's peace acts as a watchman that resists any enemy assault upon our souls. This peace will stand guard at the door of our hearts and minds, preventing the cares of life and the heartaches of disappointment from overthrowing our faith and hope in Christ. The enemy seeks to put fear into our minds to destroy our faith, but God's peace strengthens us so that we can be **"more than conquerors"** (Romans 8:37). God Himself stand guard like an elite soldier. No wonder then that this peace surpasses our ability to take it all in, but it is no less real and available to us. Such peace is only effective while we remain "in Christ Jesus". **"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"** (John 14:27) ... **"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Romans 5:1) ... **"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee"** (Isaiah 26:3).

Study 26

Six Requirements for Spiritual Peace (part 3)

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:8-9).

Introduction

The teaching about staying positive in the Christian faith has been adulterated by the so-called Faith and Prosperity Movement. Instead of maintaining a Biblical approach to this important truth, certain preachers have introduced

both pagan practices and psychological notions into the mix. We must not allow the devil to rob us of the blessings of thinking the way God wants us to, nor reject Paul's teaching here just because some abuse the text. Paul suggests six Christian ideals, and each one amplifies the beauty and peace of God into our lives, so that the world of fear, filth and faithlessness can be overcome. He asks us to fill our minds with: -

1. Truth

The first desire of any true believer is to be filled with the knowledge of God. This should be accomplished by reading and studying the Scriptures. **“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”** (2 Timothy 2:15). Once we accept that God's **“word is truth”** (John 17:17), then the Holy Spirit will **“guide”** us **“into all truth”** (John 16:13). Though nature reveals something of God (Psalm 19), it is not as reliable source of knowledge as the Bible, for only His word can set us free from the world's illusions and delusions. **“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free ... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”** (John 8:32, 36).

2. Honesty

The word “honest” actually refers to ‘honourable’ things, which means that only those things that are worthy of honour and praise ought to be upheld and promoted by us. These things are always according to true standards of righteousness and holiness rather than the world's ever changing morality. Also, if do something that we would not want others to see, then it is not honest but sinful. **“Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men”** (2 Corinthians 8:21) ... **“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation”** (1 Peter 2:12). The believer ought always to be dignified in all his or her actions and manner.

3. Just

Righteousness, which the word “just” means, is the hallmark of genuine Christianity, for it governs the hearts and minds of all who love God. **“That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous”** (Proverbs 2:20). How can we live right or justly if we do not commit ourselves to obeying God's will? **“That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”** (Romans 8:4). Also we cannot ignore the need of justice and mercy in our interaction with others. **“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”** (Micah 6:8).

4. Purity

This is absolutely opposite to the cesspool morality of the world. We do not need to do what they do, say what they say, or even think like they think. **“Abstain from all appearance of evil”** (1 Thessalonians 5:22). If we engage in the same filth they do, then we will not come out of it unblemished. The

purity Paul speaks of must never be contaminated. This is the only condition Jesus expects His true church to be in on His return. **“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”** (Ephesians 5:27). We must fill our minds with purity rather than filth. **“Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled”** (Titus 1:15). We can only do this if we aim at being pure **“even as he is pure”** (1 John 3:3).

5. Loveliness

“Lovely” must be understood in the light of the word “pure”, for it too stands opposed to the moral ugliness of this fallen world. Loveliness is found in doing those things that please God. Such loveliness becomes part of our nature when we want nothing more than to serve the Lord and be in His presence. **“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God”** (Psalm 84:1-2). Our conduct ought to ooze the love of God in us. In modern terminology we could say that Christians should be ‘loveable’ people.

6. Good report

We all love to listen to the latest juicy gossip, but in reality it is a cancer that rots away at our peace with God. Gossip is usually about something bad anyway, so it is certainly not true, honest, just, pure or lovely. Gossip is fashioned to destroy the reputation of others, but a “good report” seeks their well-being. This “good report” deals with our daily conduct too. Like Demetrius we must have a **“good report of all men”** (3 John :12) for our godly lifestyles. Our final “good report”, when we stand before God’s throne, will due to our serving God by faith. **“For by it the elders obtained a good report”** (Hebrews 11:2).

Conclusion

Paul adds the word “virtue” or ‘excellence’ to express the need of all the above and everything that comes from them. A Christian should aim for spiritual and moral excellence. **“That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ”** (Philippians 1:10). Excellence is the character and nature of Christ in us, and only that is worthy of “praise”. **“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins”** (1 Peter 1:5-9).

It is these things Paul wants us to fill our minds with, for the word “think” is more than meditation or contemplation, instead it is referring to the very foundation of who we are and the stability of our Christian lives. **“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he”** (Proverbs 23:7) ... **“Casting down**

imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). While “think” obviously means to ‘consider thoroughly’, ‘ponder’ and ‘reason’, the true meaning implies the need to be spiritually and Scripturally logical. The Greek word underlying “think” is ‘logizesthe’ and is an educational term meaning to ‘calculate’ and ‘reckon’. This means that we ought to seriously consider applying these virtues to our daily lives, for without them we cannot truly claim to be Christians. While there is nothing wrong with saying that we need to be positive in our thinking, within the context of Scripture, it may be better to say that we must be ‘sanctified’ in our thinking. **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”** (Colossians 3:16-17) ... **“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish”** (Psalm 1). Thinking in this way will transform our lives for the good. **“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind”** (Ephesians 4:23) ... **“For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit”** (Romans 8:5).

Lastly, Paul indicates that these things need to be acted upon, that is, put into action if we are to know God’s peace in our lives. What is the good of knowing the truth if we do not act upon it? **“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”** (James 4:17). Right thinking will produce holy results in our daily lives. We do not merely contemplate the concepts raised by Paul, but after reflection, we put them into practice.

Study 27

Gifts and Support

“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:10-13).

Introduction

This part of Paul’s letter to the Philippians deals primarily with the subject of stewardship, that is, offerings given by the church to maintain and support those involved in preaching, teaching and evangelism. Christians are expected to support those who are actively spreading the gospel around the world, in our city street and from the pulpit. **“For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward”** (1 Timothy 5:18). The believers in Philippi were stirred by the Holy Spirit to send gifts to imprisoned Paul by the hand of Epaphroditus (Philippians 4:18). This sacrificial giving was one of the reasons why that church flourished and prospered in the Lord. **“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully”** (2 Corinthians 9:6).

Care

The Philippians supported Paul wherever and whenever they could. Their “care” was not confined to saying a few prayers for him, but included caring about everything necessary for his welfare in this life. It seems that, for whatever reason, there were times when they “lacked opportunity” (had shortage) so could not assist him. The words “flourished again” tell us that this “care” for the apostle revived. The word suggests a tree sprouting new branches after a season of barrenness. Some commentators suggest that the reason behind the brief cessation in the gifts was due to the church being influenced by the false reports that had circulated about Paul. We see here that he holds no grudges or malice over the past, nor does he criticise them for failing to support him. It is possible that twelve years had passed since sending their last gift to Paul.

Content

Paul was neither a beggar nor a prosperity teacher, for he does not use schemes and tricks or plead for finances from the church. He does not plead poverty even though he is very much in an impoverished condition in prison. What would he say if he saw how certain ministries use every unsavoury means to twist money out of people? For that matter, where is the contentment Paul speaks of in those ministries? They are never content but

are like a bottomless pit that can never be filled. The “prosperity” cult exhibits not a trace of holiness or godliness, for the god they love is money. **“Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”** (1 Timothy 6:5-10).

Paul laboured for the Lord and received the strength needed to be content in all circumstances. He knew how to be victorious even in the most difficult times, for even these helped him realise that he must continue to be dependent on the Lord alone. Being content will keep us from the snares of greed and selfishness. The word “content” [Greek ‘autarkeia’] means ‘to be completely detached from circumstances’. Being “content” opens the door to greater blessings from God.

Being “content” does not imply that everything went smoothly for Paul, for he declares that he in fact knew terrible times of deprivation as well as prosperity. Serving the Lord taught him not to look upon the good or bad times as an indication of his spiritual condition, but instead he ought to focus his faith and trust upon Christ. **“But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me”** (Psalm 40:17). Prosperity or privations are no measure of our faith. **“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”** (Hebrews 13:5).

Christ

Every faithful believer in Christ receives the strength to perform His will. In other words, God never asks us to do something which He does not supply strength to complete. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” was never meant to be a mantra to encourage self-motivation, instead it describes the fact that it is Christ’s ability alone that empowers us for service. **“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing”** (John 15:5). In 1 Timothy 1:12 Paul writes, **“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry”**. The word “enabled” comes from the Greek ‘dunamis’ and is the same word as used for “strengtheneth” in our text. ‘Dunamis’ is where we derive the word ‘dynamite’ from, a truly powerful and earth-shattering substance! Therefore this statement simply reveals that Christ gives us the strength for whatever circumstance we face, and it is a consequence of His life in us. **“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”** (Galatians 2:20).

To the Corinthian church Paul wrote, **“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most**

gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). This reveals that, like Paul, we can face every dilemma and need in the strength only Christ can give us. **"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 8:37-39) ... **"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man"** (Ephesians 3:16) ... **"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness"** (Isaiah 41:10).

Conclusion

It is certain that Paul was not a 'grabber' who was out to prosper himself at the expense of his fellow believers. Here is a minister of the word who did not worry about if enough finances arrived in the mail to support his work. He sent out no begging letters to encourage anyone to give. Though he was delighted when support did arrive, he did not allow it to turn his head away from Christ. Paul is a good example of what someone involved in ministry should be like. In our next study we will see how the apostle Paul was overflowing with gratitude for the Philippians church's renewed care for him.

Study 28

Sacrificial Sharing

"Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God" (Philippians 4:14-18).

Introduction

This study continues with the same theme of financial assistance for those in the ministry or experiencing problems due to hardship. Here the apostle Paul expresses his joy because of the Philippian church's faithful support of his work. Their support did not come cheaply, for they had their own hardships to contend with, therefore they were truly sacrificial in their giving. The Lord gave

Paul the strength to continue in his ministry, but it was not accomplished without the faithful support of other believers.

Sharing

The Philippian fellowship was committed to assisting those who were engaged in spreading the gospel throughout the world. They were one of the few churches that gave consistently and, as it seems, beyond the normal tithe. We know that they had sent gifts to Paul while he was on his missionary trips to Thessalonica (Acts 17). The gifts that the apostle received, not only supplied his needs, but also encouraged him with the knowledge that he was not forgotten in his afflictions. Here is a church that made a difference both in Paul's mission and the spiritual lives of those they would never meet on this side of eternity. Let us never underestimate what God can do with a missionary-minded church.

Sacrifice

They "communicated" with Paul, which means, as the Greek word 'koinoneo' implies, they 'shared' what they had with him. The word 'fellowship' is derived from 'koinonia' and is used to reveal that the early church willingly shared their possessions with others. **"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need"** (Acts 2:44-45). There is no English word that can adequately describe 'koinonia', but it is best defined as 'communion by intimate participation', and partly explains the Philippian's approach to giving.

Paul did not need to coerce them into giving to his ministry. He offered them no incentives. He did not send them little pieces of stone from his prison cell if they sent a hundred denarii or more. **"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel"** (Acts 20:33). They gave because the Holy Spirit prompted them to and beside this, they wanted to support Paul. **"Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness. But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver"** (2 Corinthians 9:5-7).

Spirit

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your

professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:8-15).

We see from the above text that God blesses those who give to others in the right spirit. When we give to those who are in need, we not only bless them, but we are blessed in the giving too. **“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35). Note: We have no written record of Jesus saying this, but it must be presumed that Paul was quoting from a saying that did not reach the canon of Scripture. Also, we must keep in mind the fact that not every thing Jesus said and said was recorded (John 21:25). Therefore this is likely to be an oral saying passed on to Paul by one of the disciples. It was not the gift but the spirit that it was given in that delighted Paul.

Savour

Paul says that the gift that was sent to him by the hands of Epaphroditus was like sweet smelling perfume that deodorised his dank prison cell. Though the offering was for him, he said that it was truly like an acceptable sacrifice to God. Maybe he was referring to the ‘thank offerings’ of Leviticus 7:12-15. Though Gentile Christians were under no obligation to offer the sacrifices of the Old Testament, they were well acquainted with the customs and traditions of the Jews. This was a spiritual sacrifice that God was well-pleased with, and He would reward them bountifully. Those who do not give will never have enough, but those who give out of a pure heart, rather than expecting a reward, will receive all that God has for them.

Conclusion

We have all met ‘Christians’ who do not believe in tithing, giving or supporting those engaged in preaching the word, but they still expect to be blessed by God. We can see that the stance they take does not fit with the teaching of Scripture on any level. Anyhow, the church does not need the offerings of those who are too miserly to put their hands in their pockets. The bottom line is that spreading the gospel of Christ, though empowered by the strength of God, is still requires the sacrificial sharing of those who are grateful that the Lord saved them and are eager to see over souls coming to Christ. There is an “account” of our lives held in Heaven by the Lord. **“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”** (Romans 14:12) ... **“Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead”** (1 Peter 4:5). One day our accounts are going to be opened, and what is read from them is dependent upon what we do here on earth. **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”** (2 Corinthians 5:10). It is a joy to know that God is the “rewarder” of the faithful, **“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”** (Hebrews 11:6). The fruits of our faith will be recorded and remembered by the Lord. **“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have**

shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10).

Study 29

Riches in Glory

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Introduction

Though the text has been isolated for the purpose of this study, it is important that it is not taken out of the context of Paul's discussion on the topic of giving and receiving. Here is a verse a Scripture that has been abused by many in the 'Prosperity' teaching to swindle money from those that follow them. How easy it is for some to take this verse out of its setting and use it to promote greedy lifestyles amongst those who squander their money on themselves and give no thought for the work of God!

The requirements

Regardless of what some teach on this subject, we can be certain that God knows all about our every need and promises to supply what is required. **“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work”** (2 Corinthians 9:8) ... **“(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things”** (Matthew 6:32). This truth must be seen in accordance with God's will rather than our desires. It has been said that God supplies our needs not our greeds, for some do have the **“love of money”** and the things it can buy (1 Timothy 6:10) but it is always at the expense of their spiritual life. **“They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul”** (Psalm 106:13-15) ... **“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts”** (James 4:3).

Notice that Paul says **“My God shall supply all your need.”** Our focus ought not be on our daily need, no matter how important we think it is, but upon the God who is able to provide for us. The Lord Jesus warned against becoming fixated with food, drink and clothing, the things we spend our money on, for we cannot **“serve God and mammon”** (Matthew 6:24). Instead we must put God first in everything, and when we do so we will find that, as our Heavenly Father, He will give us what is needed for spiritual and physical well-being. **“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:**

And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:26-34).

The riches

God never forgets our sacrificial giving, but how sad it is that some believers think that He obligated to give them a hundred for every one banknote they put in the offering. Their prosperity is the wealth of this world rather than the “riches in glory by Christ Jesus”. They have £ and \$ signs in their eyes instead of love for the Lord. We might not become rich in the things of the world, but we have greater riches stored up for us. We might have to suffer deprivation and persecution for Christ’s sake, but we have the glories of His presence awaiting us in Heaven. **“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matthew 6:20) ... “Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Hebrews 11:26) ... “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).** The “riches of his grace” are of greater worth to the believer than all the treasures of the world. **“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).**

These “riches” are the eternal reward for being open-handed here on earth. God promises to give **“an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven”** to all who serve Him in this life (1 Peter 1:4). Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 11:1-2, **“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth”**.

The Redeemer

Our “riches” are “by [in] Christ Jesus”, for He is the best resource a believer will ever have. Jesus was the world’s richest Person, yet He often had no place to sleep (Matthew 8:20). Paul here starts and finishes this verse by focusing upon God; “My God” – “Christ Jesus”. By trusting in Christ, our desires change from being selfish and greedy to wanting everything He prescribes for a healthy Christian life. All we want is to live for Him and receive whatever blessing He purposes to give, even if it is only the power to face our problems in faith as the apostle Paul did. God always gives “according” rather than ‘out of’ “His riches”. Therefore we are confident that

we are backed by the full weight of Heaven's resources when we labour for Christ. What we do for **"the least"**, we are doing it for Him and will be eternally blessed for it (Matthew 25:31-46).

Our Redeemer is also the "Good Shepherd" who has already given us the greatest blessing possible, **"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep"** (John 10:11). He knows exactly what His sheep need. **"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture"** (John 10:9). We cannot but remind ourselves that Psalm 23 describes the wonderful way in which the Lord is there for us. **"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."** The closing words of Psalm 23 remind us of another of Jesus' promises found in John 14:1-3, **"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."**

Conclusion

Paul includes this statement in his letter, not to promote greed and seeking after material things, but to encourage the believers who sacrificially give to those in need. He is basically saying, "I could never repay you for all you have done for me, but my God will abundantly bless you, if not here, He certainly will do in glory." If we, like the Philippian church, look after the needs of others, then God will look after ours. He is always greater than our biggest need. **"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again"** (Luke 6:38) ... **"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us"** (Ephesians 3:20). Hopefully we will never be 'filthy rich' (see Titus 1:7, 11; 1 Timothy 3:3, 8; 1 Peter 5:2), but we can be assured that we will never be without the means to live if we love the Lord. **"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread"** (Psalm 37:25).

In closing, one commentator suggests that Philippians 4:19 can be described as a banknote drawn upon the bank of faith:

"My God" – the name of the banker.

"Shall supply" – the promise to pay.

"All your need" – the value of the banknote.

"According to his riches" – the bank's resources.

"In glory" – the address of the bank.

“By Christ Jesus” – the signature authorising the payment.

Hudson Taylor said, “When God’s work is done in God’s way for God’s glory, it will not lack for God’s supply.”

Study 30

Amen and Amen

“Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar’s household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Philippians 4:20-23).

Introduction

As we come to the end of our studies on the Epistle to the Philippians, we note once again Paul’s gracious spirit in his closing words of benediction to the church. The apostle Paul was someone who knew how to open and close his letters with the blessings of God’s grace (Philippians 1:2, 4:23). The Gospel of Christ is all about the grace of God, so it is not unnatural for Paul to keep reminding his readers of it.

Amen

It is amazing to think that the Sovereign Ruler of all things accepts and cares for us as a father does his children. **“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen”** (Jude :24-25) ... **“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen”** (Romans 11:36). He is called “our Father” to show that He is not a distant deity that exists in total isolation from His people. It should thrill our hearts as we reflect upon this wonderful truth. The One Jesus called **“My Father”** (John 15) is **“our Father”** too (Matthew 6). This “our” reveals that He is not the “Father” of some special elect class, but that He is the “Father” of all who believe. **“One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”** (Ephesians 4:6).

What a privilege it is then that we can pray directly to our Heavenly Father (Matthew 6:9) and each one of us have the wonderful blessing of calling Him ‘My Father’. **“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together”** (Romans 8:15-17). We should constantly remind ourselves of this glorious truth. **“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To**

redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:4-6).

And amen

Throughout this letter we have noted the fact that Paul's desire was to influence others, even from within the confines of a dank, miserable prison cell. He calls all those who believe “brethren” and “saints”. We understand that those who had travelled to minister to Paul would be classified as this, but it is certain that he is including those who had come to know Christ with Caesar's household. Notice how he highlights the fact that there were Christians amongst Nero's servants, soldiers and possible even his own family. He held no malice against the Romans or those associated with them, but is happy to call them brothers and sisters in Christ.

“Saints” does not mean that they were pure, sinless or absolutely perfect, instead it shows that true believers are the people of God. The Greek word for “saints” is ‘hagian’ and simply refers to things that have been set apart, dedicated, for the Lord's use. It has to include the fact that “saints” are different from the world in thought, word and deed. How can they be called God's children if they do the things that unbelievers do? Does that not mean they would be Satan's children instead? **“If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not”** (John 8:42-45).

Those who truly love Jesus keep His commandments (John 14:15).

Both the believers in Philippi and the coverters in Rome were equally “brethren” and “saints” in Paul's eyes. From the highest-ranking official to the lowest slave, each one was a child of God, **“For there is no respect of persons with God”** (Romans 2:11). This knowledge should keep us from thinking that we are better than anyone else because we have a higher social standing than them, for in reality we are all saved sinners. **“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”** (Romans 12:3) ... **“Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits”** (Romans 12:16). Social standing, nationality, colour or gender are simply manmade devices that promote snobbery rather than sainthood. **“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:26-28). The Gospel of Christ links people together who would otherwise have no other bond. There ought to be no cultural, economic or social barriers with the family of

God. The “grace” of God is for “all” who accept the “Lord Jesus Christ”. We should be able to raise an ‘amen’ to this.

Conclusion

In many ways the Philippian church is the model of a good congregation. It consisted of different kinds of people, from all walks of life, who united together for the purpose of spreading the word of God. They were not immune from conflict within or outside their community, but they learned, through being willing to listen to sound doctrine, to overcome and resolve any differences.

In this epistle we have read about humility, self-sacrifice, unity, joy and other important truths beside these. Each one reveals something about how we can live a successful Christian life as we grow in maturity in Christ and His word. We are not left to “**work out**” the Christian life all by ourselves (Philippians 2:12), instead we have the abiding presence of God’s Holy Spirit enabling and empowering us. Paul’s own life is a great example of what dedicated service for God is all about. We would do well to follow his lead and aim to have the same spiritual understanding, concern and compassion as the Philippian church did.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”