

Dear Friends,

Casual believers often think of Philippians as their "Feel good" book of the New Testament, seldom grasping the grave reality that Paul teaches in the book regarding the price of that "Dose" of "Feel good" medicine. Jesus reminds us that the life of a follower of Him and His teaching is not an easy path, especially not easy on one's ego. (Luke 9:23 KJV) Populist Christianity, which is not remotely akin to New Testament authentic Christianity, looks for easy fixes and shortcuts to the good life. They can't imagine that God didn't give us a quick fix shortcut to mature New Testament faith in Jesus as our life's exclusive guide. They never stop looking for Jesus plus something, and they often invest more of their personal emotions and both mental and physical energy in whatever the latest "Plus" is, not in Jesus and His way. Increasingly, I am persuaded that the best way to nudge these people to rethink their compromised faith is to simply ask them to provide New Testament "Book, chapter, and verse" directly from the New Testament for their latest quick fix. If they can't provide it, only the Lord can convict them and, if necessary, chasten them to the extent that they are willing to repent and return to the Jesus of the New Testament, not another Jesus and another gospel. (Galatians 1:6-9 KJV)

Yes, if we study the New Testament examples and teaching, we must conclude that the life of faith, New Testament faith, is a challenging path, but the Lord ensures that it is always worth far more than we imagined. Perhaps we need to study the New Testament link between the challenge and the blessings. And such a focused study should wisely begin with a thorough study of Philippians.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Philippians

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 1:9-11 KJV 1900)

My hope in this brief overview of each New Testament book is to give the "People in the pew," ordinary believers, a helpful sense of each book. As I begin my reflections and study for each book, I find myself struggling to capture its major points. Not an easy task at best. Philippians especially has been difficult. Paul covers several major themes in the letter. His letter is wholly encouraging, both for the church and for Paul. We sense the overarching importance for unity weaving its way through the whole letter, culminating in his direct admonition to two ladies in the church who apparently needed this public reminder to stop their bickering and work harder at the task of harmony. But we cannot capture the message and overlook the foundational truth that supports all the letter, **the glory and example of Jesus**. In Philippians, we are reminded powerfully that Jesus is not only the one proper object of our worship. He is also our example for godliness and for unity. As the verses above teach us, we learn wise judgment to "... approve things that are excellent" and to nurture "the fruits of righteousness" by Him, His teaching and His example. Chapter two contains one of the New Testament's most heavenly descriptions of our Lord, as well as one of its most imposing requirements of authentic discipleship. Then we arrive at the third chapter where Paul exemplifies what it really means to strive for the mind of Jesus in our lives. As Paul gave up all his accomplishments and pride for the knowledge of Jesus—and the power of His resurrection—we also must reach that spiritual height of selfless faith and service if we hope to live our lives in His knowledge and His fellowship.

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment. We cannot deny that love involves a delightful link to our emotions. However, modern Christians often

magnify their emotions and ignore other factors of Biblical love to their spiritual loss. Paul regarded a process of spiritual growth and maturity so important that he earnestly prayed for the Philippians to experience it. He prayed for their love to abound in knowledge and judgment, no mention of their emotions. The “Engine” that powers a godly faithful life is seen in these two qualities, knowledge and judgment. Our emotions, when controlled and focused by godly faith, are part of the cargo we carry by faith. Believers who make their emotions the engine of faith will stall and fail when life’s pressures invade their life. What drives our actions? Biblical teaching and Jesus’ personal example or our emotions? When we feel the heat of difficulties, do we immediately look to Scripture and work at living its teachings? Or do we ignore Scripture and follow our emotions? Philippians contains one of the New Testament’s best and clearest guides to steer us through those difficult waters by the faith-way of thinking and living.

According to this lesson, Biblical love is to be defined and characterized by Biblical knowledge and judgment. This is the objective of Paul’s prayer for the Philippians. It should be our prayer for our own faith, as well as for each other.

That ye may approve things that are excellent. What do we approve or disapprove? And on what basis do we make those judgments? Pastors stay busy teaching folks the right—the Biblical—basis on which to make these judgments. They also stay busy trying to heal their members who made the wrong judgment based on unbiblical ideas and are bewildered that things didn’t turn out well. Paul’s prayer of substance goes to the heart of this major problem. He prays for the Lord to guide the Philippians to discerning, Biblical judgment, for them to approve and to disapprove ideas and conduct based on Biblical teachings, not on the popular cultural ideas of the day or their favorite political or philosophical ideas or personalities.

In the remainder of the first chapter, Paul offers his personal example. Even if his present house arrest leads to his death for his faith, he has no hesitation. He is committed to use his life, both the good and the bad things that happen to him, to move him closer to the Lord. If he survives, he shall have occasion to preach and edify the Philippians and other believers. If he is martyred, he shall be with Christ in glory. He can’t lose! When we walk by Biblical faith—when we make our choices based on Biblical faith alone—neither can we.

Philippians 2 advances Paul’s teaching to the Christ-like selfless, others-above-self core of authentic Biblical faith. We have the perfect example in Jesus. He was God manifest in human flesh. Yet He didn’t claim regal palaces and high honors during His Incarnation. He lived His life on earth wholly to serve and bless others, not Himself. (Luke 22:27, Romans 15:3 KJV) Following his emphasizing Jesus as our example of selfless, other-serving Biblical faith, Paul devotes the remainder of Chapter 2 to the details of living that selfless, other-serving life. When you read the early verses of Philippians 2, don’t stop. Read to the end of the chapter. The Lord works this mindset in us, but Paul reminds us. We have a lifetime of work to follow the Lord’s working instead of our own ideas and ways. Self-denial is not a “Once and done” decision we make at the beginning of our Christian journey. It is a daily decision that we must renew constantly. Otherwise, we shall soon discover that we invest far more of our life’s purpose and energy into our own ideas and ways than for either Jesus or for other believers.

Chapter 3 takes us deeper into the heart of this Christ-centered faith-walk. Although, by the human measure of his native culture, Paul could boast with the best, he gladly discarded all those pride-filled accomplishments, counting them all loss to clear his life’s agenda of anything other than “***That I may know him.***” Despite populist teaching, this is not a salvation context. Paul was saved on Damascus Road many years earlier. In this lesson, he identifies the mind of faith. To know Jesus as Paul longed to know Him involves both knowledge and experience. It defines Paul’s life-objective, not something that he experienced only on Damascus Road. The gain-for-self teaching of many in the Christian culture contradicts Paul’s teaching. His faith was not about gaining for Paul. It was about losing Paul and seeing his life purpose and work in Jesus and for His service. We can’t embrace faith or good works with the idea of gaining for self and find such blessings. We embrace the faith-way as we grow so strong in Jesus that we willingly lose self and personal gain for the honor of Jesus.

Chapter 4 reveals an instructive surprise. After writing the first three chapters with such emphasis on selfless faith and service that unifies believers, Paul quite directly confronts two ladies in the Philippian Church who have failed in this task.

I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. (Philippians 4:2 KJV)

Apparently, these women were involved in some kind of contention or strife for their preferred way. Paul understood that correction of error requires confronting it, as well as those involved in it owning it. So long as we ignore error in church or in our life, it will grow. What starts with Eudoiias and Syntyche shall soon involve other believers. Paul's intent in this verse is not to embarrass these two women. He hopes to get their attention. Can we doubt that he did! Thereby he teaches them that being "**of the same mind in the Lord**" is always more important than getting one's own way about any petty issue in a church.

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.
(Philippians 4:3 KJV)

Paul doesn't name this "true yokefellow" whom he urges to encourage and help other godly women who were more invested in the harmony of the church and the advancement of the gospel than in their own interests. Paul clearly teaches that women are not to be preachers in the church (1 Timothy 2:9-15 KJV). Nothing in this context remotely hints that Paul was following a contemporary cultural norm. His use of Adam and Eve emphasizes that he intended this principle to be an enduring truth for leadership and teaching in the Lord's church till the Second Coming). However, he fully respects and honors godly faithful women who serve Jesus and labor to help the church and those who do preach the gospel. They serve an invaluable need. God bless them and their selfless faith.

In two simple verses, Paul models both wise and faithful confrontation of error or strife in a church and commendable godliness that strengthens the spiritual health of a church. Are we strong enough in the faith to confront error as Paul did in this lesson? More to the point, are we strong enough in our faith to receive correction and take it to heart, if need be?

Paul closes this delightful letter with rich teaching on personal faith that looks past life's problems and pains to Jesus, that avoids worry by constantly looking to Jesus and not to our problems. In this teaching, he shows us the path to intimate, strong, and enduring fellowship with the Lord.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7 KJV 1900)

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 4:9 KJV 1900)

What greater state could we imagine? The peace of God keeping our hearts and minds through Jesus, and the God of peace faithfully dwelling with us through life's sometimes difficult, painful, and lonely path. We can't gain this blessed fellowship with Jesus by our personal imagination or our private opinions. We attain it only as we immerse our lives, our minds, and our conduct in Him as we see Him revealing Himself in Scripture. We must take our spiritual path through chapters one through three before we can possibly arrive at the spiritual peace and fellowship with Jesus that Paul describes in Chapter Four. Only when/if we are willing to pay the price Paul teaches in those chapters can we ever possess the peaceful joy in our lives that he teaches in the final lesson. How much are you willing to give up, to pay, for your faith? For fellowship with Jesus?

Elder Joe Holder