

Dead Man Living (Philippians) – Part 3

Paul's history with the church at Philippi is recounted in **Acts 16**. He made repeat visits to the Christians there during his later missionary journeys, and a relationship was forged. Years later, when he was taken to Rome as a prisoner awaiting trial before Caesar (at the end of Acts), the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to do what he could to help the Apostle. Unfortunately, Epaphroditus suffered a near-fatal illness during the time he was in Rome; after he recovered and brought news of the church to Paul, he returned to Philippi to deliver the Apostle's letter.

You've heard the death row expression "Dead Man Walking"? Well, Paul is a **DEAD MAN LIVING**. He is on the first century equivalent of Death Row at the end of the book of Acts, under house arrest in Rome, and knowing that his only hope of freedom lies in the hands of the despotic Emperor Nero. But you would never know it by the tone of his "prison epistles" (Philippians is the last of these letters to the churches – he writes some personal letters later.) In the middle of the worst circumstances, Paul is unmistakably HAPPY. Why? Because he has learned that **the WORST circumstances are often the BEST opportunities** for God and the gospel to work!

Chapter 1 – The secret of joy in spite of CIRCUMSTANCES is having a SINGLE MIND ("Christ first").

Chapter 2 – The secret of joy in spite of PEOPLE is having a SUBMISSIVE MIND ("others next").

Chapter 3 – The secret of joy in spite of OPPOSITION is having a SPIRITUAL MIND.

Background: Due mainly to the ministry of Paul, the Gentiles were now coming into the church without becoming Jews first. This was not a problem BIBLICALLY because the Old Covenant was no longer in effect. It was not a problem with the LEADERSHIP of the church because they had met together in Acts 15 and given guidelines to be followed. It was not a problem with GOD'S SPIRIT because it was the Holy Ghost that was leading Paul. (The Bible, Spiritual Leadership, and the Holy Ghost are the "teachers" that speak into our lives, and they should always agree.)

However, this situation was a major problem with the JUDAIZERS, who were the dissenting voice (the minority!) at the Jerusalem Council. As a result, they actually followed Paul wherever he went and tried to steal his converts and the churches he had planted. They mixed Law and Grace.

v. 1 – Paul doesn't mind reminding them of these things, because getting grounded in doctrine keeps us "SAFE"

v. 2 – Paul calls these false teachers DOGS, EVIL WORKERS and the CONCISION ("mutilation") – the last term is a play on the word circumcision (i.e. they are only mutilating their bodies, not meriting salvation)

v. 3 – WE are the circumcision – we don't just have a SYMBOL of the covenant, we have the REALITY – and as a result we (1) worship God in spirit, (2) rejoice in Christ, and (3) have no confidence in the FLESH (i.e. our flesh is sinful, without any capacity to merit salvation or please God). The Bible has absolutely nothing good to say about the flesh, and yet many people depend entirely on what they can do to please God!

v. 4 – Paul describes his own lofty achievements in Judaism, which were greater than those of the Judaizers, but still did not merit salvation.

v. 6 – "zeal" – the Jews considered zeal to be the highest virtue of religion – ZEAL COMBINES LOVE AND HATE!

v. 7 – Paul uses terms from "accounting" here (i.e. profit and loss statement) – he becomes an "auditor" and discovers that his old life was BANKRUPT. Everything that he thought was in his "profit" column was actually in his "loss" column! How could a sincere man like Paul be so wrong? Because he was using the wrong measuring stick to evaluate his life! When he looked at others or at himself, Paul felt righteous – but not when he looked at Christ!

v. 9 – Paul lost his own "(self-) righteousness" but he gained Christ's IMPARTED righteousness!

v. 10 – "made conformable unto his death" – Christ died to save sinners, and Paul had that purpose in a lesser sense – he would willingly die!

v. 11 – "if by any means" – "I will do whatever it takes!"

v. 12 – "not as though I had already attained" – the "RACE" toward Christlikeness begins with a sense of spiritual DISSATISFACTION!

v. 12 – "follow after" – "press on" – a Greek word used of a sprinter, referring to aggressive, energetic action (i.e. straining every muscle to win)

v. 12 – "apprehend" – "lay hold of" (i.e. capture)

v. 13 – to be distracted by the PAST debilitates our PRESENT efforts / an unsaved person is controlled by the past, but a Christian looks to the future

v. 13 – in Bible terminology, to FORGET does not mean "to fail to remember" – it means "to no longer be influenced or affected by" (that's why God can forget our sins!)

BREAK THE POWER OF THE PAST BY LIVING FOR THE FUTURE. You cannot change your past, but you can change the MEANING of your past.

v. 14 – “the mark” – Christlikeness here and now / “the prize” – Christlikeness in Heaven / “high calling” – “upward call”

v. 15 – “perfect” – “mature” / Paul left in God’s hands those who were not pursuing spiritual maturity, because he knew that God would reveal the truth to them eventually even if it meant chastening them

v. 16 – “whereto” – “to the degree that” / “walk by the same rule” – “walk in line” (i.e. stay in line spiritually by progressing in the same principles)

v. 17 – “followers” – “imitators” (Paul was modeling the process to them!)

v. 18 – “enemies of the cross” – these people were WITHIN the church!

v. 19 – “whose God is their belly” – they followed their fleshly appetites / “whose glory is in their shame” – they boasted about their sin and abused Christian liberty to defend their behavior

v. 20 – “conversation” – CITIZENSHIP (we are a “colony of foreigners”) / “look” – “eagerly wait” (waiting patiently, but with great expectation)

v. 21 – “subdue” – the Greek word refers to arranging things in order of rank – Christ has the power both to providentially create natural laws and miraculously overrule them – that’s what He will do at the Rapture!

There is tremendous energy in the present power of a future hope!

- Because Abraham looked for a city, he was content to live in a tent (Heb. 11:13-16).
- Because Moses looked for the rewards of heaven, he was willing to forsake the treasures of earth (Heb. 11:24-26).
- Because of the "joy that was set before Him" (Heb. 12:2), Jesus was willing to endure the cross.
- The fact that Jesus Christ is returning is a powerful motive for dedicated living and devoted service today ("And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" – 1 John 3:3).