

Distinct in Christ, Distinctive in the World

Philippians Review

"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ"

Introduction: In his recent book *Revitalize*, Andrew Davis delves into the question of how a church can *become and remain* healthy, particularly after it has seen a habit of turning toward worldly concerns over Biblical truth and dwindling numbers in terms of new converts and mature members. He boiled down part of the issue is that a church that fails to know and practice *two journey's of disciple making*, a church will be imbalanced and face inevitable death:

*"Making disciples to the ends of the world and to the end of time is the work He has left us to do. A disciple is a whole-life learner, someone who is conformed to both the doctrine and lifestyle of the master. The Great Commission involves not only bringing people to that initial moment of saving faith but also teaching them wholehearted obedience to **everything** Christ has commanded us. This is how every Christian and every local church can glorify God. But churches in need of revitalization almost inevitably have turned away from this commission to follow worldly pursuits. Every revitalization effort must culminate in the church being transformed to embrace the **vision of growing disciples and making other disciples. Unless this happens, the church will most certainly die.**"¹*

Two journey's...two realities...two essentials, to see the gospel of Jesus Christ reach people in Simi Valley and the broader valley as well as the ends of the earth, and to continue deepen our love, knowledge, and character in Jesus Christ as we walk with Him in obedience. Over the last year and a half we've prayed for, sent out, and have seen God begin to revitalize a church in Rancho Cucamonga, but we are keenly aware that Grace Church in Simi Valley must stay laser focuses on our mission in order to stay healthy, to grow believers and reach those who do not yet believe. Not only is this a mandate for the whole of Scripture and the New Testament, it is clearly seen in our study of Philippians.

We started in chapter 1:12 where Paul said what happened to him, his imprisonment awaiting trial for his life/death *"has really served to advance the gospel"*, to reach those in the praetorian guard. Paul knew that what happened to him circumstantially did not hinder his mission, but actually **created progress in it**. Then is 1:25, he said if he stayed on the earth and in prison, it was for *"your **progress and joy in the faith**"*. In other words, his life was about **progress in the gospel, both in those who did not know Christ and those who already did**. Evangelism and discipleship were not two separate ventures, but were intertwined in the work of the gospel, reaching and growing people in the gospel.

Paul started this letter with greetings to the **saints in Christ Jesus** (1:1), offering grace and peace TO them from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He now ends the letter similarly. He greets every saint in Christ Jesus, which was more individual than general, and encourages that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ will be WITH their spirit (4:21, 23). Right before this final greeting he reminded the church of its **main priority, greatest mission and highest goal: To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.**" (4:20). This is the purpose behind all that we do, driving our worship, obedience, and work, and the encouragement that God's church will not fail. Our ultimate goal is to glorify God, and we have His grace WITH us in the pursuit, so we have all that we need. So this morning, we want to do a quick run through of Philippians, getting our minds around the main concepts and themes, and make sure we ask

¹ Andrew M. Davis "Revitalize: *Biblical Keys to Helping your Church come Alive Again.*" p. 199.

ourselves the questions pertaining to the **distinct relationship with have with Christ, since He is Lord, and how that helps us be distinctive in the world, reaching others with the glorious gospel of Jesus.**

Joy Rather than Depression/Happiness

Besides his focus on Jesus Christ as Lord, a driving focus of this letter is the reality and possibility of joy. Joy is the settled understanding of our position in Christ, which governs our hearts and minds in peace, so that we can have a positive perspective in the midst of suffering, uncertainty, and pain. Joy is found distinctly in Christ alone, and communicates that distinctive to the world around. Martyn Lloyd Jones preached a series on this topic which was put into a book called *Spiritual Depression*, of which he said,

*"Believing as I do that the greatest need of the hour is a **revived and joyful Church** the subject dealt with in these sermons is to me of the greatest possible importance. **Unhappy Christians** are to say the least, a poor recommendation for the Christian Faith; and there can be little doubt but that the exuberant joy of the early Christians was one of the most potent factors in the spread of Christianity*

"In a sense, a depressed Christian is a contradiction of terms and he is a very poor recommendation for the gospel."²

Joy is not a secondary pursuit but primary. It is a fruit produced by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and exercised because of and in the Lordship of Jesus Christ (3:1). What did we learn about joy?

Joy as a Perspective (1:18-21)

*What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, **Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by my life or by death, for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.***

Joy is bullet proof when it comes to circumstances, as opposed to happiness which is dependent on them. The problem with circumstances? None of us can control them, so happiness is a non-winner, a poor philosophy to chase after. Paul wrote this letter from prison where his freedom, comfort, and relationships were cut off. His future was uncertain, awaiting trial that would determine his life or death. But **because his life was settled in Christ, his future was secure.** His new lens in life was not to fear the future, but simply hopeful that Christ would be honored IN his life, whether God chose to let him live or whether he faced death. If death is the worst we can face, then the worst is truly gain, since we gain Christ. **If living is not Christ, then dying will not be gain.** So the challenge in fighting for joy is simply the challenge of finding our greatest joy IN Christ, which then gains perspective in all of our fear, pain and uncertainty.

Joy as a Mission (1:25)

*"Convinced of this, I know that to remain and continue with you all, for your **progress and joy in the faith**"*

But joy is not simply an internal reality nor a stagnant concept, it becomes our mission. Paul would rather have gone home to be with Christ (he made no bones about that), but if he was going to stay, it was going to be for the progress and maturity of the church, particularly in the area of joy and faith. He said he was a worker for others joy (2 Cor. 1:24), which is the message that the gospel brings. Salvation

² D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *"Spiritual Depression: Its causes and cure"*, p. 11

is not simply about getting out of hell and God's wrath, it is experiencing a newfound joy in life. Our mission for this church is that we are growing in our joy IN CHRIST, and in doing so, the world will take notice.

Joy as a Choice (4:4)

"Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, Rejoice!"

Joy is a choice for every believer, which means it is **possible**, yet difficult. We rejoice **in the LORD**, since Christ has done it all, accomplished our redemption on the cross, freeing us from our past, securing our present, and promising our future. We do not rejoice in the pain itself, or in the anxiousness, or in the rejection by the world, but we rejoice in the Lordship of Jesus. Life is hard. We face difficult realities and decisions every day. To rejoice is no act, no plastic smile, no pretending everything is peachy. It is a deep seated commitment to Christ, and by faith and grace, to live out that reality boldly, confidently, and positively.

Is joy evident in your life? Are you fighting for it, choosing it? Are you seeking to view circumstances through a lens of joy, or fear? Why do you think your joy is lacking? Is there an area of your life that needs to change?

In Christ Rather than Ourselves

If this letter to the church at Philippi was a sponge, Christ would go everywhere if you wrung it out. This is a book about Jesus. It started in the formation of the church in Acts 16 where we see the Spirit of Jesus directing the spread of the gospel (16:7), the name of Jesus powerful enough to cast out demons (16:18), and salvation coming to the house of the Philippian jailor by believing in the Lord Jesus (16:31). If we do a simple walk-through of this 4 chapter letter, you can't go very far without being confronted with the reality, Person, and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are saints in (1:1) and servants of (1:2), who will bring the work of the gospel in us to completion (1:6). Paul has the affection of Christ for the church (1:8) and seeks purity and blamelessness at His return (1:10), filled with the righteousness that comes through Christ (1:11). Paul is imprisoned and suffers for Christ (1:13), has confidence in (1:14) preaches (1:15) and proclaims (1:17-18). His desire is that Christ is honored (1:20) and Who he wants to live for (1:21) and be with forever (1:23). We glory in Christ (1:26), live out the gospel of Christ (1:27), suffer for the sake of (1:29) and find encouragement in (2:1). We follow His example and have His mind (2:5), since He made Himself a servant (2:7) humbled Himself to death on a cross (2:8) and God exalted Him (2:9) gave Him the name Lord (2:11) that every knee would bow before (2:10). It is Him that we hope in (2:19), seek the interests of (2:21), trust in (2:24) and risk in (2:30). In Him we rejoice (3:1), glory in (3:3), count all things loss for (3:7), is the surpassing value to know (3:8), from Whom all righteousness comes (3:9) and Whom comes the power of the resurrection (3:10). He made us His own (3:12), He is the prize of the upward call (3:14), and when He returns (3:20), He will give us transformed bodies like His (3:21). In His Lordship we stand firm (4:1), agree in (4:2), rejoice in (4:4), knowing He is near (4:5) and will guard our minds and hearts (4:7). So we rejoice in (4:10) the one who strengthens us (4:13) to find contentment in all things, and gives according to the riches of His glory (4:19). And I may be missing some. That is the Christ who is distinct, who saves us, keeps us, guards us, makes us righteous, and promises to come back for us. That is why trusting in anything or anyone else for life and salvation besides Christ is absurd.

No Confidence in ourselves (3:3)

*For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, **and put no confidence in the flesh***

There were those who taught in the church that people had to ADD works, even the sign of circumcision, to *really* be saved. That still goes on today, in *every religion*, since we all have a sinfully innate desire to contribute to our salvation. But Paul was abundantly clear about the distinct salvation we have in Christ alone: *we put no confidence in our flesh, in anything we could do or any righteousness we could add*. Faith in Jesus is a vote of "no-confidence" in ourselves. We yield ourselves completely to His work. This is not only the gateway of justification, but the pathway of sanctification. We are saved by Christ alone and sanctified by Him alone, knowing that we can work because He works in us first and powerfully (2:12-13).

We Pursue Christ & Live out Gospel Realities (1:27; 3:14)

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

In light of the work of Christ to save us, we are called to two specific things: *live out the reality of the gospel, and press on toward Christ, becoming like Him*. Living in a manner worthy of the gospel means that we are never removed from our necessity for it, since we still need grace everyday and need forgiveness everyday. This is not a passive type of life but one of dogged pursuit. We pursue the knowledge of Christ because we want to and are able to know Him. He has called us friends if we do what He commands (John 15:14), and has made us His own. Our maturity is measured in our growth in pursuit of Christ, since it requires us to forget what was behind us and straining ahead for what He promises. This is **distinctive from determining growth by church attendance or mere morality**, but is based on our growing love for Jesus (which requires both church attendance and obedience). It is out of this relationship that we have a true love for those OUTSIDE of Christ.

What is your relationship like with Jesus? Is it active and growing? How are you intentionally pursuing Him? What sin needs to be put off? What discipline needs to be engaged?

Suffering Rather than Compromise

The easiest way to avoid suffering is simply to compromise, and the best way to avoid conflict with the world's system is to merely capitulate to it. We have seen this recently in churches and higher educational establishments, who would rather yield to public pressure rather than stand by faith in Biblical truth. But the reality for us as individuals and as a church is that if we live for Christ, we will suffer. This means that we will experience loss, pain, persecution, and an enemy who will scheme in any and every way to take us down. Not only did Paul experience this type of treatment, but our brothers and sisters in Philippi did as well. They were born out of suffering, and lived in it and through it. But here is what we learned about the **distinct nature of suffering**.

For the Advance of the gospel (1:12)

"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."

Suffering was the path of ultimate victory for Christ as He endured physical torment by men and became a curse on the cross, bearing the wrath of God for us. It was through this that God's wrath was satisfied and Christ's righteousness given to us. In Philippians we see that Paul was very clear: the way that a certain segment of Rome would hear the gospel was *through* his imprisonment. He suffered so that he

could be an instrument that God would use for the gospel. This would also embolden others who were fearful to speak up. We often see our suffering or pain as a *reason* to question God's goodness rather than seeing how God is using it for advancement. Paul's chains were not **obstacles but rather opportunities**, since God does not make mistakes or waste our pain.

As Evidence of God's Grace (1:28-29)

*"and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also **suffer for his sake**"*

Suffering, pain, an uncertainty can fuse together or break apart. Suffering and opposition creates a unique opportunity for the church to fuse together, to **stand firm and strive together**, locking arms and putting aside any petty differences that would drive apart. This is possible because of one of the most mind-blowing verses in all of Scripture, let alone Philippians: *It has been granted* (gifted - grace) to you *for the sake of Christ* to believe and suffer! We believe in Christ for Christ and because of Christ. That is amazing grace! But we also suffer as a measure of His grace, when we suffer for His sake. Christ never called us to do something He was unwilling to do nor anything that He would not strengthen us to do. This kind of suffering is a **clear sign of our salvation, distinct in Christ and distinctive to the world.**

What fears control you? What have you been unwilling to do because you are afraid of what others will do or think? What kind of suffering do you think we will face individually and as a church?

Humility Rather than Pride

Philippians gives us one of the clearest, most profound statements on pride and selfishness in all of Scripture. We are to consider others as having surpassing value greater than ourselves, and do nothing from selfish ambition. In a world that sees pride as an ultimate standard and where personal rights should never be violated and personal feelings should never be offended, Paul makes it a point to show how counter-cultural our life in Christ is. Much like Jesus reminding the disciples that greatness in Christ's kingdom is defined as childlike humility (Matt. 18:4), we are called to lowliness of mind and heart. This is not a one time choice but a consistent reorganization of values and mindset since I drift toward and default to pride and selfishness, which blooms in every kind of sin. But the command was not given to us in vacuum.

Follow Christ's Example (2:5)

Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus

We have been given the same mindset of Christ since we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). He gave us the game plan, where even though He was in the form of God, He took on the form of a servant! The God of the universe *humbled Himself*. The One by which the universe exists and sustains *humbled Himself*. The One who deserved praise and applause *humbled Himself by taking* the spit, beatings, and nails in His hands and feet. our problem with humility is that we think far too highly of ourselves, and think of ourselves too much. We must adopt a mindset NOT of self-preservation and self-righteousness but of the mind of Christ, who received vindication AFTER God raised Him.

Fight For Our True Citizenship (3:20)

For many...walk as enemies of the cross...But our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body"

What is distinct about our church in terms of humility? We know we are not living for this world alone. The enemies of the cross glory in shame, focus on their appetites, and set their minds on earthly things. In other words, life is about the here and now, happiness here and now, getting what we can in the here and now. In Christ we know that one day He will return, bringing us to Himself, and giving us newly transformed bodies, rescued from these fleshly ones. Living **distinctly in the world** means we set our minds on things above, not things below (Col. 3:1). This requires repentance from our pride and selfishness, remembering that our true citizenship is in heaven.

Where does pride and selfishness rule in your life? How does it affect your relationships? How does it diminish your joy?

Together Rather than Alone

It is abundantly clear in this study of the mutual love and care that was demonstrated by Paul and the Philippian church. They sent provision with Epaphroditus, and Paul desired to cease their anxiety by sending him back along with Timothy at some point. Paul knew them individually, prayed for them often, and rejoiced that they continued to partner with him. We cannot do this life alone. Sin will try to isolate and our enemy wants to keep us alone, since we were created for relationship.

Pray For Those We Love (1:9)

*And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be **pure and blameless** for the day of Christ"*

We pray diligently for those that we love, and what we pray for should be distinct. Each day we are preparing for a wedding day, a day we will be united with our greatest love, so our prayer for each other is that we will grow in love, purity, and blamelessness.

Purposeful In Relationship (1:23-24: 4:14)

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble

Christian relationships should be distinct in Christ and distinctive from the world. Starting next week we will look at what the Bible says about friendship and relationship, in ways that were demonstrated by Paul and Timothy, as well as the church at Philippi.

*"This world is full of sorrow because it is full of sin. It is a dark place. It is a lonely place. It is a disappointing place. The brightest sunbeam in it is a friend. **Friendship halves our trouble and doubles our joys.**"³*

³ J.C Ryle, *Practical Religion*, p. 317