

Week of September 17 - 23

Paul's Example for the Christians at Philippi (Philippians 3:1-21)

Paul warns the believers to watch out for those wicked dogs who say you have to be circumcised to be saved. "It isn't cutting our bodies that makes us children of God but worshiping Him with our spirits. That's the true circumcision. Christians recognize what Christ has done for us and that we are helpless to save ourselves."

He adds that if anyone had reason to hope he could save himself, it would be him (Paul). He had gone through the Jewish initiation ceremony when I was eight days old, had been born into a pure-blooded Jewish home that was a part of the original Benjamin family. He was a member of the Pharisees who demanded strict obedience to every Jewish law and custom. And he added he persecuted the Christians, trying to obey every Jewish rule and regulation right down to the very last point.

But now Paul knows that all these things he once thought had value are worthless compared to knowing Christ. He put it aside from his own pedigree, claiming it worth nothing, so he could have Christ and become one with him, no longer counting on being saved by being good enough or by obeying God's laws. Trusting in Christ would save him. God's way of making people right depends on faith, counting on Christ alone. He found it to be the only way to know Christ and to experience the power that brought him back to life again, and to find out what it means to suffer and to die with Him.

He realizes he isn't all he should be but struggles to reach the end of the race and receive the prize God has for him in heaven because of what Christ did for him.

Paul encourages the Philippian believers to pattern their lives after his. Many walk along the Christian road who are enemies of Christ. Their future is an eternal loss since their god is their appetite, and all they think about is their life here on earth. But our homeland is in heaven, where Christ is, and we're looking forward to his return. When he does come back, He'll take our bodies and change them into glorious bodies like His own.

Paul Says We should Rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:1-23)

Paul exclaims, "Always be full of joy in the Lord, rejoice! Let everyone see you are unselfish and considerate in everything you do. Remember that the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray about everything, tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this, you'll experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can imagine."

As he closes this letter, he adds, "Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about."

He says he learned how to get along contently whether he had much or little. He knows how to live with almost nothing or with everything. He learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether it was on a full stomach or hunger, plenty or want, for "I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power."

At the moment, he had all he needed. Their gifts to him were a sweet-smelling sacrifice that pleases God. God who will supply all our needs from His riches because of what Christ has done for us.

A Special Request for Philemon (Philemon 1-25)

Paul's letter to Philemon has a lot of discussion about slavery and prison because he wrote it from prison to ask for the freedom of Philemon's slave Onesimus.

The letter is known as Philemon. Paul wrote it to Philemon, a leader in the church at Colossae, and begins by explaining his gratitude for the church in Philemon's house and mentions his prayers regarding the church. Paul says, "I always thank God when I am praying for you, dear Philemon, because I keep hearing of your love and trust in the Lord Jesus and his people. And I pray that as you share your faith with others, it will grip their lives too, as they see the wealth of good things in you that come from Christ Jesus. I have gained much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because your kindness has so often refreshed the hearts of God's people."

He then talks about forgiveness and reconciliation. He doesn't identify himself as an apostle, but as "a prisoner of Jesus Christ" and calls Philemon a "fellow laborer" and brother. Then Paul moves to his point, saying he had a request. Onesimus had robbed and run away from Philemon and had fled to Rome, where he came in contact with Paul's teachings. He accepted the Christian faith and had become a Christian. He was now returning to Philemon with Paul's letter in which Paul asks Philemon to free him and receive him as a "beloved brother." Paul pleads with Philemon to consider Onesimus "no longer a slave but a beloved brother."

He tells Philemon to charge him with any money Onesimus owed, and he says he will repay it all. He then closes the letter, instructing Philemon to prepare a guest room for a visit from him.

Colossians Overview

Paul is in prison in Rome when he wrote this letter to Christians in Colossae. Colossae was over 1,200 miles away in Turkey and not a very prominent city. The Christians there were saying, "Christ plus." Paul responds with "Christ plus nothing!"

Christ Is Fully God (Colossians 1:1-29)

Paul tells the Colossians how thankful he is to hear of their faith in Jesus Christ and says he has been praying for them to lead lives worthy of the Lord. He then provides his theology of Jesus Christ, probably the most incredible description of Jesus in the Bible:

"Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God. He existed before God made anything at all, and Christ himself is the Creator who made everything in heaven and earth, the things we can see and the things we can't, the spirit world with its kings and kingdoms, its rulers and authorities, all were made by Christ for His use and glory. He was before all else began, and it is his power that holds everything together. He is the Head of the body made up of his people, that is, his church which he began, and He is the Leader of all those who rise from the dead, so that he is first in everything, for God wanted all of himself to be in his Son.

"It was through what his Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to him – all things in heaven and on earth because Christ's death on the cross has made peace with God for

all by his blood. This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies and hated him and were separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions, yet now he has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through the death on the cross of his own human body. As a result, Christ has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are standing there before him with nothing left against you, nothing left that he could even reprimand you. The only condition is that you fully believe the Truth, standing in it steadfast and firm, strong in the Lord, convinced of the Good News that Jesus died for you, and never shifting from trusting Him to save you. This is the wonderful news that came to each of you and is now spreading worldwide. And I, Paul, have the joy of telling it to others."

Paul then speaks of his suffering, comparing the purpose of his suffering to the suffering of Jesus Christ, saying, "But part of my work is to suffer for you. And I am glad, for I am helping to finish up the remainder of Christ's sufferings for his body, the church."

Rules for Holy Living (Colossians 2:1-23)

Paul continues to express his desire the believers to be strengthened in their faith and urges them to avoid being deceived by false teachers, with their dangerous philosophies and beliefs.

Then he talks about spiritual circumcision as he has done in his other letters. He says, "When you came to Christ, he set you free from your evil desires, not by a bodily operation of circumcision but by a spiritual process, the baptism of your souls. In baptism, you see how your old, evil nature died with Him and was buried with Him; and then you came up out of death with Him into a new life because you trusted the Word of God who raised Christ from the dead.

"You were dead in your sins, and your sinful desires were not yet cut away. Then He gave you a share in the very life of Christ, Who forgave all your sins and erased the charges against you, the list of his commandments you had not obeyed. He nailed this list to Christ's cross. In this way, God took away Satan's power to accuse you, and God openly displayed to the whole world Christ's triumph at the cross where your sins were all taken away."

Paul says to avoid being deceived by those who focus on worshiping angels or "dwelling on visions" instead, keeping their focus on Jesus."

Paul explains that the teachings of false religions are just the manmade teachings of humans.