

Philippians

Bible Study Outline

Focus

The letter to the church at Philippi provides for us an opportunity to look more closely at the “Live” and “Love” charges that we discussed in the 4L series. The letter itself was written as an encouragement to the church at Philippi, that they might remain faithful in their pursuit of the spiritual life and loving posture that they experienced through Jesus. This kind of life and love is explained by Paul using two key words that he references throughout the letter: humility and joy. The church at Philippi needed to be reminded to pursue a life that was sacrificial yet joyful at the same time, and we embark on this study for the purpose of learning about and living in this same kind of life.

Outline

Teaching 1

Date: September 1, 2019
Passages: Philippians 1:1-11
Topic: Introduction

Teaching 2

Date: September 8, 2019
Passages: Philippians 1:12-30
Topic: Gospel Perspective

Teaching 3

Date: September 15, 2019
Passage: Philippians 2:1-11
Topic: Humility Of Jesus

Teaching 4

Date: September 22, 2019
Passage: Philippians 2:12-30
Topic: Humility Toward Others

Teaching 5

Date: September 29, 2019
Passage: Philippians 3:1-11
Topic: Joy In Finding Christ

Teaching 6

Date: October 6, 2019
Passage: Philippians 3:12-4:1
Topic: Joy In Eternity

Teaching 7

Date: October 13, 2019
Passage: Philippians 4:2-9
Topic: Joy Brings Peace

Teaching 8

Date: October 20, 2019
Passage: Philippians 4:10-13
Topic: Joy Through Contentment

Teaching 9

Date: October 27, 2019
Passage: Philippians 4:14-20
Topic: Joy Through Giving

Teaching 10

Date: November 3, 2019
Passage: Various
Topic: MissionFocus

Theology

The theology of Philippians is centered around the necessary truths that fuel a sacrificial lifestyle patterned after that of Jesus himself. In doctrinal terms, we refer to this area of study as Incarnational Theology. Incarnation means “to become flesh.” Related to Philippians, we will look at what it meant for Jesus, as God, to become a human being and do the work that the Father sent Him to do while in that state.

In this expressed purpose of informing and exhorting us into incarnational living, Philippians also has a few verses that are problematic from an interpretation standpoint. In this document we will offer some brief thoughts to consider in interpreting these verses correctly and in preparing for those who might view them differently.

We will look now into these two areas, initially taking a closer look at incarnational ministry. We will then move to addressing some of the more problematic passages in Philippians.

Incarnational Theology

John 1 tells us that the Word (Jesus), who was in the beginning and created all things, became flesh and lived among us. Not only this, but the passage goes on to state that through this “becoming flesh,” Jesus revealed the nature and person of God and His love to us in how He brought grace and truth into our lives. This occurred in two ways:

- First, through Jesus’ lifestyle of giving to those who could not purchase what was necessary for themselves (grace). This giving occurred in both the day-to-day functions of His life and, ultimately, in the sacrificing his own life.
- Second, through Jesus informing us of the Truth necessary to change and shape our lives (truth).

These verses must be understood as the intent, or the expressed aim of the incarnation of Jesus (to reveal God’s love to mankind). Although this is the doctrinal truth that is to be understood in the coming of Jesus as a man, this is not the only thing that the incarnation teaches us. One of the ideas in the John 1 passage that is not explicitly stated is the practical, postural nature of the incarnation of Jesus. Where as the Gospel of John outlines the ultimate aim of the incarnation, Philippians teaches us about the posture of Jesus in embracing and stepping into the incarnational call from the Father. This will be our focus as we study the book of Philippians. We want to deeply consider the personal beliefs and lifestyle choices that we must embrace if we are to live the incarnational life of Jesus.

“He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it”

Philippians 1:6 introduces this phrase, which understood in the context, is a very encouraging promise that should help us as we pursue the incarnational lifestyle of Jesus. The problem with this phrase, however, is the somewhat common misinterpretation that this is a promise of an individual believer’s guaranteed spiritual growth and transformation. When we read the context, it is much more plausible to conclude that this was a promise from God to the church at Philippi because of their choice to partner with Paul when he left to pursue ministry in Macedonia (Acts 17:14). In this interpretation, God was

promising that the initial investment and commitment that the church made in supporting Paul would go on to reap spiritual fruit until the return of Christ. Church history supports that this was true because their faithfulness in supporting Paul has been an example to the church of Jesus Christ from that day until the present. The application of this promise for us as a Church is similar to what was true for the Philippians: As we partner with Jesus in the missional expansion of the gospel via incarnational living, He will be faithful to build His Church through our faithfulness. As we, and the next generations, remain faithful to this partnership, Jesus will be faithful to bring our work to completion upon His return.

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”

This phrase, found in Philippians 2:12, has also brought confusion to some who have interpreted it to mean that a person's salvation is only authentic when the individual's pattern of life demonstrates holiness and change. There is also a tendency by others to place too much emphasis on the “fear and trembling,” concluding that a person who claims to be saved must act right (holiness) or else God will bring on immediate punishment. And for those who do not immediately repent, they should “fear and tremble” because it may ultimately result in a loss of their salvation.

These variant interpretations are extreme for sure. The context, as mentioned in the beginning of verse 12, indicates that Paul is referring to “obedience” or the walk of the believer. The “working out” of one's salvation is better translated as “live out of the new life that you have already received.” In this sense, Paul is merely challenging the church to faithfully follow the one in whom they believed for salvation, Jesus Christ.

The words “fear and trembling” evoke the same usage that is recognized throughout the Old and New Testaments. These words are meant to speak to a sense of awe and respect for God, and, in the case of spiritual living, one must approach it with this sense. We walk with God in who He really is, not who we want Him to be. Yes, He is our Father, yet He is God the creator and sustainer and judge of all mankind. We must not take His Word lightly, nor should we develop a pattern of disregard for His leading in our life.

“In the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain”

This phrase, found in Philippians 2:16, echoes many other passages where Paul addresses the issue of eternal rewards. The pride that Paul mentions here is certainly not the sin of personal pride, but a joy and fulfillment that will be realized when Jesus judges him and his work for Him as faithful and good. This is a spiritual reality that is evident in Paul and mentioned in nearly every letter that he wrote. With that understanding in mind, we must not only be prepared to personally embrace this reality for ourselves, but also to properly and biblically defend its veracity. Many struggle with eternal rewards because they feel that the notion is sinful and self-serving. In the context here that Paul is speaking of, he presents it merely as a reality for those who are giving their lives for the incarnational mission of Jesus and who are motivated by His life and example before them.

Application

Considering that the focus of this letter is primarily on the areas of spiritual life and expression, it would be important to prepare yourselves, as a leadership team, to lead your MCs into these types of discussions and considerations. It is most helpful to then think through the application in two simple ways: personal understanding and personal engagement.

A primary focus for MC leaders throughout Philippians should be to strive to help the people in your MC to personally engage with the meaning of the spiritual truths they are hearing. We suggest that much prayer and planning be focused on how to engage the people of your MC with the content that we are studying. This is often encouraged best when you lead people to personalize the content rather than to generalize it. We desire that people wrestle with the meaning for themselves rather than just giving answers in the form of basic spiritual platitudes. Do your best to ask people how they are understanding the truths that they are hearing. Even consider asking them what areas of their life have most been impacted by the truths they are hearing. This might be uncomfortable at first, but this will help them to personally engage in what has been taught.

In this same way, it is crucial that we strive to help the people in our MCs to personally apply and live in the truth that they are learning in Philippians. As has been stated already, an important component to this process is to lead folks into discussions and scenarios where they must consider the personal application of the truth. We want to help people learn the lifestyle of inviting the Bible to convict and move them into the thinking and lifestyle that God desires for them. Giving them time to pray and think about it is key, but follow-up discussions about how they are personally living in the truth is vital.