

Twenty-Eight Days in Philippians
Study Three: Days Fifteen to Twenty-One
Philippians 2:25-3:21

Day Fifteen

25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.

27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.

V. 25 – It appears that the Philippians were so concerned with Paul’s well-being while he was in prison that they sent an emissary from their midst to see how he was doing and to minister to his needs. This man was declared by Paul to be his “brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier.” I would like to have those titles or descriptions attached to me. But Epaphroditus was also a messenger; the word there for messenger is *apostolos* or apostle. He had been sent forth from the Philippian church and thus was an apostle, a sent forth one.

I am intrigued by how many desire or accept the title of apostle in the modern church. The problem for some is that they never go anywhere! I know a man who is a “bishop” and has responsibility for only two churches, and one of them is in bad shape! This is absurd! If you are an apostle, you are sent forth on a specific duty or task. You can’t be a local pastor and be an apostle. Most “apostles” who also pastor a local church are neglecting the churches under their oversight because they can’t let go of their local church duties, usually for financial reasons. And going out to speak at a local church other than your own doesn’t qualify one for the apostolic title. Often that is only a means to enhance personal income and isn’t an apostolic function.

The word apostle, as used here, wasn’t a title but rather a function. Epaphroditus was functioning as one who was sent forth. He didn’t have business cards with the title “apostle” on them.

Vs. 26&27 – It is of note that Epaphroditus almost died. Based on Paul’s comments on death being better than life in chapter one, it is interesting that he commented that God had mercy on him and let him live. I suppose that there was still work for Epaphroditus to do, just like there was for Paul. It seems that Paul was already encountering sorrows and this man’s death would have added more sorrows. It is hard to see that Paul was in sorrow because he was so upbeat and joyful.

When I suffer, I want others to know it. But Paul didn’t want to burden the church with his troubles and was sending a trusted associate back to them so they wouldn’t be worried about his welfare. Paul was a good apostle and pastor.

Day Sixteen

28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.

29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him,

30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

V. 28 – Paul had anxiety? That’s what he wrote. I am glad that Paul was so human. We have put Paul in stained glass windows, stuck a halo over his head and refer to him as St. Paul. But he was not a perfect man, often hard to get along with, especially if you disagreed with him. I am not trying to denigrate Paul; I am trying to encourage you. You don’t have to be perfect or sinless for God to use you. Paul had anxiety and was subject to all the frailties of humanity. You are human, too. If you are waiting for God to overrule your humanity to use you, you will wait a long time. God wants to use you now, with all your imperfections and weaknesses. Will you let him?

Vs. 29&30 – It is of note that Epaphroditus was sick and Paul did not comment on his lack of faith for being sick. Paul treated it as a natural event of life. Don’t get me wrong; I am against sickness and believe the curse of sickness was broken through the cross. Yet I see illness as a part of fallen man’s plague and there are good people, God’s servants, who get sick. I used to think they didn’t have faith and there are some who teach that. It is interesting that Paul did not make that connection here. In fact, Paul honored Epaphroditus, implying that his sickness was the result of his service to the body of Christ.

How easy it is to judge other people and their problems. I used to have all the answers for someone who wasn’t experiencing what I considered the full blessing of God. But I have stopped being God’s judge and watchdog. Bad things happen to people, good people, which are beyond explanation. I have stopped attributing those to their sinful attitudes or lack of faith. I now try to stand with them and comfort them as a brother should do.

Paul urged the Philippians to honor Epaphroditus when he returned home. I do believe that men and women of God are due as much honor as we can possibly bestow on them. I don’t believe, however, that these leaders should insist on this honor. Apostles, pastors and leaders must be “welcomed in the Lord” and not in carnal displays of lavish banquets or financial gifts. Any honor must be spiritual and not contrived to fulfill church politics or denominational traditions.

Day Seventeen

1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

2 Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.

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

4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:

V. 1 – Paul was at the halfway point of this letter and began his conclusion with the word “finally.” This is a long conclusion, proving that Paul was a preacher who like many of us didn’t know how to end a message! He also said that it was no trouble to repeat the same things so that there would be no doubt what was important to the Philippians. I had a seminary professor who would spend the first 30 minutes of every class reviewing past material. At the end of 14 weeks, students knew what the professor expected us to know and what was important to him.

I have had to learn as a speaker and teacher that just because I said something once doesn’t mean that everyone has heard it or comprehended it. I am trying to be more deliberate in my teaching style that will give room to go over material more than once. As Paul said, it is for the good of the student.

V. 2 – It is an established fact that there were teams of men, called the Judaizers, who followed Paul’s ministry. They would come into areas after he had been there to tell the believers that they had to follow the Mosaic Law now that they put their faith in Christ. Can you imagine having someone deliberately undermining your work, no matter where you went? That is part of what Paul had to endure. And to some extent, these Judaizers were successful in their efforts to get people to depart from Paul’s instruction.

I have no doubt that these Judaizers were sincere Jewish believers. Yet the devil was using them to sow seeds of error into the early church. But God allowed this to happen. A great controversy emerged and energy and attention were focused on this issues, culminating in the Jerusalem conference described in Acts 15. The apostles decided for Paul and against the Judaizers, and today we Gentiles don’t follow the Law of Moses because of that Council’s decision.

Paul had unkind words for these Judaizers, calling them dogs and referring to their belief in the necessity of believer’s circumcision. He also categorized them as evil. At first glance, it would not appear that these Judaizers were “evil,” for they were simply teaching adherence to a belief system that Paul himself had been loyal to all his life. But Paul understood clearly that their teaching undermined faith in Christ and caused men to put their faith in a system and he could not allow that to continue.

V. 3 – Man has searched for a system since the fall of Adam that would somehow put him in touch with God. In that sense, you can say that mankind is religious. We have tried to devise elaborate and simple sets of rules that would explain God and our relationship with Him. None of them have worked. Faith in Christ is the only thing that brings us into right relationship with God. I have belonged to several “systems” in my 30 years of walking with Jesus. There were times that I lived for my “system” more than I lived for Jesus. I put my trust in the “flesh”— who my pastor was, what my specific beliefs were about spiritual authority and miracles, and the enforced need for commitment and loyalty among church members. I was wrong. I put my trust in flesh, in a religious system that had all the appearances of being spiritual.

V. 4 – Paul was a perfect example of what he was teaching. If anyone ever had reason to put confidence in his heritage or religious credentials, it was Paul. What I learn from

this is that I cannot put my confidence in how I worship, in faith itself, in the superiority of my doctrine when compared to others, in my experience or my studies. I can only put my trust in Christ.

Day Eighteen

5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;
6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.
7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.
8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ
9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Vs. 5&6 – Paul listed his “fleshly” credentials and they are impressive. He had the right family tree and a superb religious resume. Paul stated that he was faultless in keeping the legalistic rituals of the Pharasaic Law. That is quite a statement! He kept all the little rules and regulations that Israel had developed without fail! And he expressed his pedigree by persecuting the Church. Paul wasn’t content to just live out his beliefs; he was ready to give his life to make sure others did as well. Paul was a magnificent man, totally committed to his cause.

As I write this, I am watching the war with Iraq on television. I see the hatred of Islam for the West, which they equate with Christianity, and I wonder how all this will ever be worked out. The only answer is the gospel for both sides. When I see the zeal of Islam and then consider the zeal of Paul, I pray for a “Damascus-road experience” for as many nonbelievers as possible, no matter how fanatical they may be. If Jesus did it for Paul, He can do it for anyone.

V. 7 – There was some profit for Paul in keeping the Law as he did. I would recommend that you read Romans 7 at this point to understand Paul’s views on the Law. He taught that the Law was and is good (the Ten Commandments are still a standard of morality, even for nonbelievers). Paul learned that it was impossible for sinful man to keep the Law (as holy as it was) and that the Law was instituted so man would recognize his inability to keep it, cry to God for help and receive Jesus the Savior. Instead the Jews made a career out of trying to keep the Law in their sinful state.

The Jews took God’s Law, took it to new levels of devotion and obedience and ended up killing the God of their Law when He came in the form of Jesus. That just blows my mind! That is why Paul said that he gained so much more in Christ than he ever had in the legalities of Judaism.

V. 8 – Paul saw that he had to pay a price to know Jesus. He lost something so that he could find something. I think of a few verses that relate to this theme:

Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding (Proverbs 23:23).

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44-46).

What price have you paid or are you willing to pay to know Jesus? This translation says that Paul counted it all rubbish; the Greek word should be translated "dung." That is how Paul saw what he had in Pharasaism compared to what he eventually had in Christ.

V. 9 – We don't start in faith and end in works. We don't find Jesus by trusting God but end our journey trying to keep a new Law. That is why Paul was so infuriated by the Judaizers, who tried to tempt people to find Christ by faith but then walk after Christ by a system of rules and regulations. It is all about faith in Christ.

Paul realized that his flawless performance where the Law was concerned was simply a system of self-righteousness. He was earning "points" with God and doing as good of a job as any man could do. But he came to realize that it wasn't about "points," it was about faith and a righteousness in Jesus. I cannot underestimate how dramatic Paul's conversion must have been. He made a massive transition from the Law to faith in Christ.

God gives us His righteousness when we put our faith in Christ and it is a righteousness we could never, ever earn or achieve on our own. I think of one of Jesus' parables:

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'"(Matthew 22:8-13).

What you're wearing is important to God? Whose garments do you have on? Are you trusting God for your righteousness or are you still trying to earn his favor and grace? The choice is yours, just like for Paul. Paul chose the righteousness that only faith in Christ could provide, and he realized the older he got just what a bargain he had received.

Day Nineteen

- 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.
12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.
13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,
14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Vs. 10&11 – Paul wanted to know Christ, but his knowledge wasn't to be an intellectual or head knowledge. It involved the power of resurrection, which can only be obtained through suffering and death, which leads to an ultimate physical resurrection. We can have a measure of resurrection life in us at this time. This presence of the Holy Spirit comes as we die to certain things and ways of doing things and yield control to the Spirit of God. But the ultimate goal is our physical resurrection and everything else now is just a down payment, a foretaste of the life that is yet to come.

Let's look at some of Paul's verses that addressed the topic of resurrection. (Note that Paul was always looking to apply the reality of the resurrection to daily life):

By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also (1 Corinthians 6:14).

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6-7).

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Colosians 3:1).

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you (Romans 8:11).

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them-- yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Vs. 11-13 – There were some who believed that the resurrection had already taken place, not necessarily in Philippi.

Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:17-18).

This was the second doctrinal error that Paul addressed in this letter, the first being the effects of the Judaizers. Paul had to counter the work of workers of deceit and he had to do it without rapid transit or the Internet. The work of an apostle is to preserve the purity of the faith and what is being taught. A regular prayer of mine is, "Lord, keep from deception and doctrinal weirdness." I am serious when I pray that prayer.

Paul talked about forgetting the past, and most apply that principle to those bad things that happened or mistakes that were made. But I think we must also apply that to our past success. We must forget what we have done lest we begin to rely in the present on our past history and become irrelevant.

It does seem, however, that Paul was referring to the resurrection and that the past was his fleshly credentials outlined in verses 5 and 6 in this chapter.

What parts of your past, good and bad, do you need to put behind you? What is the goal for which you are pressing on?

V. 14 – Paul pressed on. That means that there was something pressing against him and he needed to press against it if he was going to make any progress. To help him do just that, Paul had a goal that he was pursuing. That is the power of a goal. It enables you to press through the inertia that tends to keep you at rest to attain the prize. What goals are you pursuing at this point in your life? Are these goals upward? Do they bring you closer to God and godliness?

Day Twenty

15 All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

V. 15 – While Paul was a great overseer and teacher, he still realized that it was up to God to make things clear to people. Paul declared the truth, but God was the one to open the hearts of people to that truth. It took me quite a few years to figure out that I could not be the Holy Spirit to the people I pastored. I had to deliver truth, but I could not make people respond or obey it—only God could do that. When God showed me that truth, I became a different pastor, set free from trying to do an impossible task.

Also, Paul referenced those who are mature. You cannot fault anyone who is immature, unless they should be mature and have refused. When my son was five years old, I could not expect him to mow the lawn. It was beyond his capacity, and wasn't a matter of obedience. But when he was 16, it was a different story. Be careful not to expect mature results from immature believers, even yourself. There is a growth and maturation process that everyone must encounter as they mature in Christ.

V. 16 – Paul urged the Philippians to live up to what they had already attained. In other words, don't worry about what you don't have, but make sure you apply what you have learned. Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). Are you putting what you know into practice? Do you apply your values, those things that are important to you, on a daily basis?

V. 17 – Paul both taught by word and example. When he planted a church, he had integrity—there was total consistency between who he was and what he taught as evidenced by what he did. There is great power in modeling what you teach, and not just implying, "Do as I say and not as I do." There is a story about Gandhi who was approached by a mother who wanted Gandhi to talk to her son about not eating sugar. Gandhi told her to come back in three weeks. When she did, Gandhi told her son not to eat sugar. The woman asked why she had to wait three weeks, and Gandhi replied, "Because I was still eating sugar three weeks ago myself."

V. 18 – I don't think Paul was referring to enemies of the cross who weren't professed believers. I think he was talking about believers. Can you confess Christ and be an enemy of the cross? I think you can be. At least, there are times when I've been such an enemy, declaring the truth but not walking it out in my own life.

Day Twenty-One

19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,

21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

V. 19 – This described those who were enemies of the cross: their mind is on earthly matters and they are driven by inner desires in which they glory. And these are supposedly Christians! Paul would not have recognized some of the casual Christians that exist today. People who walked forward at some meeting, or who closed their eyes during a television broadcast, prayed a prayer and then claimed to be saved. Salvation without the cross being applied to your carnal appetites is no salvation at all. There

must be visible evidence and fruit (but not perfection) that comes from following Jesus that brings resurrection power now and resurrection life in the future. I want to set my mind on heavenly things.

Vs. 20&21 – Our citizenship is in heaven. That is where our allegiance should rest. From there we will receive our heavenly Savior Jesus who will make our bodies like His body after He came back to life. Think of how Jesus' glorified body was: He could eat, move through locked doors, vanish from sight, yet be touched and cook food. He had flesh, but there was a glorified dimension of who he was that was radically different from how the disciples had first met Him. That is how you and I will be when we have our resurrection suits on! We will no longer be bound by the human limitations that we know now, yet we will still be human! That was Paul's goal that he kept in sight and I suppose it should be mine as well. If it was good enough for Paul, it should be good enough for me.

What about you? Where is your citizenship? Is the resurrection your goal and are you willing to forsake all, forget all and press on toward that? If you are, then that means you must make some adjustments and focus on heavenly things now. Not later, but now. Otherwise you run the risk of pursuing earthly things and that can lead you down a wrong path.

As we close this third study, I challenge you to not make this life your goal, but the next one. Once your eyes are set on the correct prize, then put everything in this life in the proper perspective, for it will all pass away. Pursue what will last and you will not be disappointed when you receive your citizenship papers in the resurrection from the dead.