

BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

1. This is one of the 4 Prison Epistles written by Paul. It is one of the nicer epistles to read because it is not about problems in the church. It is easy to understand because it is not deep doctrine; but focuses mainly on one's relationship with others and on one's walk with the Lord. The doctrines which are difficult to understand are:
 - a) "Justification by Faith" in the books of Romans and Ephesians.
 - b) "Unity with Christ" in the book of Ephesians.
2. Who was this epistle written to?
 - a) This epistle was written to the Philippian church.
 - b) Philippi was located on European soil and had a strategic foothold; thus, the first church was founded in Europe. God sent Paul to Philippi so that He could use Philippi to reach out to other cities in Europe.
 - c) The city of Philippi was named after the father of Alexandra the great, Philippi. Philippi was made a Roman colony so that whatever happened in Philippi would be considered as if it had happened in Rome. Hence, Philippi had a very distinct Roman characteristic; and many retired Roman soldiers thus chose to live there. The people in Philippi were loyal to the Roman Empire, therefore, they were anti-Christianity because the Romans regarded Caesar as god.
 - d) Thus, the Philippian church was under a lot of persecution. BUT it became stronger as a result and also endeavoured to support Paul's mission.
3. How was the Philippi church founded?
 - a) The church was founded by Paul as recorded in Acts, Chapter 16. He was travelling westward across Turkey towards Europe. Paul had made no plan to go to Philippi, BUT then Paul had a vision about a Macedonian call. So, he heeded the call.
 - b) Usually, Paul would visit the synagogue first whenever he reached any city. However, Paul could not go to the synagogue in Philippi because Roman cities did not have any synagogue. Instead, Paul went to a place where Jews held their prayer meetings and where they celebrated the Sabbaths. Paul found a ladies' prayer group and met a lady named Lydia (who was from Asia Minor, Turkey) who was a seller of purple dyed cloth. Through Paul, Lydia and her household were saved.
 - c) There was a girl who was possessed by demon. She told everyone that Paul was from God. Paul cast out the demon in her as he was disturbed in his work by the girl. Hence, Paul destroyed the business of the man who had been using the girl for fortune telling because the girl had no more commercial value after the demon was cast out of her. For that, Paul was arrested as they accused Paul of bringing in a religion which was against Caesar.
 - d) One midnight while Paul was in jail, an earthquake happened which broke the lock of the jail. However, Paul did not escape. Under the Roman law, the jailer would be crucified if the prisoner escaped. The jailer asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" when he realised that Paul did not escape, and thus he and his family were saved.
 - e) A core church was formed in Philippi attended by only Lydia's and the jailer's families. The magistrate then decided to release Paul from prison, but Paul

refused, because he felt that he ought not to have been jailed in the first place as a Roman citizen. Paul requested an apology from the magistrate. Paul had spent only a very short time in Philippi but the church there did not collapse due to Paul's discipleship of Lydia and the jailer. They watched what Paul did, and then they learnt to preach as Paul did.

4. Why did Paul write this epistle?
 - a) The Philippian church subsequently sent money to Paul when he went to jail. Not only did they send money, they also sent a man named Epaphroditus to help Paul while he was in jail. Epaphroditus became sick and he nearly died. However, rumours then spread to the Philippian church that he had died. After Epaphroditus recovered, Paul wanted him to return to the church and tell them that he was healed by God's grace, and not by Paul.
 - b) It is interesting to note that Paul somehow could not heal Christians though he had heal many others during his evangelism. It was recorded in the Bible that Paul could not even heal Timothy of his stomach problem. God usually used healing miracles on unbelievers to convict them of His power.
 - c) Paul wrote this letter as a means of thanksgiving and encouragement. The letter was not about any particular problem faced by the Philippian church.

Chapter 1

1. Philippians 1:5.
 - a) The term "partnership" was worded as "fellowship" in the NKJV. Actually, the word "fellowship" carries a less correct meaning and has been used loosely by churches today.
 - b) In Greek, the word "partnership" is koinonia, which means close partnership; and where one suffers, another suffers as well. It implies one Body, whereas fellowship refers to people just engaging or sharing in discussion, but "your problem is still your problem!" Partnership means that when one toe suffers, all other body parts suffer too!
 - c) God wants partnership amongst His people, not fellowship (Romans 12:15). We should note that unbelievers also engaged in lots of fellowship, e.g. drinking, karaoke, etc.
2. Philippians 1:8. The phrase "yearn with affection" means "bowels are moved!" This means the two parties are one Body. It is not just simply not hating each other but having a close bonding; unlike our church fellowship today which is merely members coming together only to chit-chat..
3. Paul told them, "Don't worry about my imprisonment" because it turned out well. "I am not stuck with the guards in jail, but they are stuck with me". The guards became his captive audience as they could only change their shift every eight hour. It was as if the guards in each shift were lock-downed with him just as we are presently locked-down in Covid-19. Thus, the whole group of imperial guards in the Roman Palace had heard or knew about Christ.

4. Philippians 1:21. Paul said, “To die is gain”, and told them not to worry about him dying.
 - a) This attitude should be our Christian mind-set and the truth we should live out! We should aim for only one goal - we live to glorify Christ. But to die is to return to the Lord forever. Paul was eager to die, but he was willing to stay on Earth, which to him was a sacrifice. His reason is very different from good Christians who are willing to die because they see dying for Christ as a sacrifice. To Paul, staying on Earth was a sacrifice versus good Christians who think dying is a sacrifice. Paul felt that staying on Earth kept him away from Christ. He thought that he would not get what he wanted as long as he did not die.
 - b) Pastor Paul Choo also gave his own example. When he gave up his medical profession to serve God, it was not a sacrifice but an upgrade to a higher privilege because, to him, serving God is far better!
 - c) Thus, martyrs may actually not be willing to stay on Earth! It is an “upside - down” world in God’s Kingdom.
5. Philippians 1:27 urged Christians to unite and share together as one (due to persecution). That was Paul’s prayer for them.

Chapter 2

1. Philippians 2:2-4 instruct Christians to be “likeminded, having the same love, and being of one mind”. True humility means counting others more significant than self and looking out for the interest of one another. When Christians are serving together, there will inevitably be friction, e.g. the smart ones may look down on others, the decisive guy may think others as slow and useless. We are inclined to always think that we are better. So how can we possibly do what Philippians 2:3-4 demands?
2. Philippians 2:5-8. The answer lies in the fact that all believers have the mind of Christ in us! Christ did not count Himself equal to God, but emptied Himself and became human and obedient to the point of death. The only way to achieve Philippians 2:3-4 is to have the mind of Christ so as not to think of ourselves as being better than others! Christ humbled Himself though He is God. He did not hang onto the privileges of being God although He did not stop being God. He was 100% man and 100% God. What privileges did Jesus put aside?
 - a) Glory in heaven. In heaven, the angels praise Jesus day and night - “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty”. Yet on Earth, he had no need for anyone to even carry His bags!
 - b) Omnipresence.
 - i. As man, He could only be at one place at any one time. He had to walk from place to place. Every miracle that He did was helped by the Holy Spirit. He did His first miracle of turning water into wine at the age of 30 only after His public baptism. He could have done it as a child, but He never did. Christ never become less than God.
 - ii. As an example, when Pastor Paul Choo (PC), was running his own company, his company staff would attend to him with, “Yes, boss”. But during mission trips, he does not want anyone to serve him even

though he is still the boss. He puts aside privileges that belonged to him! Do not expect others to serve you when on missionary trips! PC does everything himself. Rather than being addressed as a Director, he wants to be known only as a missionary so that he can be part of the people.

- iii. To be like Christ, we have to make a choice. It is having an attitude of willingness to put away privileges so that we can work alongside with others. Many missionaries expect others to serve them, and so the church ended up busily serving them instead of the missionaries serving the people!
 - iv. We need to have the mind of Christ in order to blend in just as Christ had blended in so well with the ordinary people; to the extent that he could only be identified with 30 pieces of silver because they deemed him so ordinary.
3. Philippians 2:12 says you have to “work out your salvation”, not work for your salvation. Christ has already worked for our salvation. As an example, PC had an American friend who helped him enhance his business skills. But it is PC’s responsibility to work out what he had gotten free from that American friend! Similarly, what we had gotten for free from God, we have to work it out!
4. Philippians 2:13 says God works in us to will and to do.
- a) He gave us the Holy Spirit to sanctify us by faith so that the life of the Holy Spirit will be seen in us.
 - b) One positive effect would be that we will stop grumbling. Philippians 2:14. The evidence of a true believer is that the person displays very little disputing and grumbling or petty quarrelling. The problem is that we always think that we deserve better! Thus, we grumble about others being slow in serving us, etc. We also keep disputing and saying things like, “Why are they so stupid? My way is right, yours is wrong.”
 - c) The Holy Spirit will humble us so that we will be willing to put away such pride.
 - d) Two examples of people who served humbly and quietly in the Bible were Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Chapter 3

1. Philippians 3:2. The phrase “look out for dogs” means to be mindful of those who told you that you need to be circumcised! We must be wary of false teachers who keep insisting that there is a need to add works to the Gospel to make it a “full gospel”, and they start adding rules that you have to obey. Christ is lost under the burden of obeying rules or law and it became “me obeying the law”. You can see two ends of the spectrum of people:
- a) One will tell you that there is “no need to fulfil the law”
 - b) The other will say that you “must fulfil the law by your own works!”
- But, both are wrong! The correct way is to trust Christ who gives us strength to fulfil the Law of Christ! The Law of Christ is stated in Mark 12:30-31. There are only 2 important laws and there is NO need to remember and do all the 613 Jewish laws.

Every time you see a neighbour, just ask yourself “How would Christ serve him?” and go do it. Legalism is always a temptation.

2. Philippians 3:8-9 speaks about Salvation by Faith. Paul counted all things lost that he might gain Christ.
3. Philippians 3:12. Jesus has made us His own. Let us imitate Paul, who imitated Christ and walked like Him. Get to know Christ experientially, and not just have head knowledge about Him. Walk like Christ by emptying ourselves and be humbled like Christ! God lives in man to serve men! Be like Paul and Christ who looked so ordinary and humble while serving others. God is serving us humbly every day, yet we don't see Him; e.g. we can see God's hands in the books of Esther and Ruth though God was never explicitly mentioned in these two books of the Bible. Let us walk with men, and not above men!
4. Philippians 3:18-19 talks about who the enemies of God on the cross are. These people have their “bellies as their gods”. They do all things to satisfy their own appetites. Their minds are on earthly things, e.g. status, possession, comfort, fanciful cars, expensive penthouses! You can easily tell if a man is really serving God by what his mind is set upon!

Chapter 4

1. Philippians 4:2. Two ladies in the church had differences, both thinking they were right. Both were faithful women, yet they were always quibbling. Paul advised them to be humble like Christ. We do not always need people to think we are right!
2. Philippians 4:4 gives a command to rejoice always.
3. Philippians 4:5 speaks about letting your reasonableness be made known to all the people you are serving.
4. Philippians 4:6-7 says we are to “Be anxious for nothing”.
 - a) This is the formula for anxiety that we must “in everything (including worries), give thanks and pray.”
 - b) It is not merely saying to ourselves “Don't worry”, but we are to replace our worries and thank God for what we have and to pray.
 - c) For example, if we lose our job, we should pray for another job; yet at the same time, give thanks to God that we still have food, good health and a roof over our head, etc.
 - d) The cure for worry is to repeat this prayer continually. This is a very practical advice.
5. Philippians 4:8 reminds us to meditate on good things and to focus on things that are praiseworthy; e.g. the beautiful sky, birds singing, etc. We are to keep our minds focussed on good things that God have provided. There are thousands of nice things to focus our mind on versus worrying over one thing. Our bad habit is that we focus only on the problem, and we do not pray nor do we thank God or praise God for beautiful things.
6. Philippians 4:11.

- a) Paul thanked the Philippian church for the gift of money, but he said that he did not need it because he had learnt contentment. In 1 Timothy 6:8 Paul said that food and covering were all he needed and that he had enough. The greatest attitude is contentment. A contented person is always happy.
 - b) A greedy person is never satisfied. He wants that one pair of shoes that he has set his eyes on, even if he already had 3000 pairs. A greedy person will think that when he had conquered the whole world, he still has not yet conquered the underwater world. Greed is the greatest cause of dissatisfaction while contentment is the greatest cause of satisfaction.
 - c) BUT unfortunately, parents tend to teach children greed!
7. Philippians 4:13 is a verse that is commonly used out of context. Paul said that regardless of how much he had or how little, he could do all that God wanted him to do! It is not like claiming, "I can remove Covid-19!" which is totally used out of context.
8. Philippians 4:17. Paul said that he was not seeking a gift. He was thankful for the gift but he already had food and shelter in jail. He was happier over the fact that their gift to him showed that they had the "Fruit of the Spirit". The one you give to, is not the one who is blessed, but you, the giver is blessed. See Acts 20:35.

What do we learn in the book of Philippians?

We have a God who makes Himself lowly and is serving us quietly. He serves me every day without me realising it. It is not just agape love but His humble service. Let us pray that we can be like Him!