



Philippians Masterclass

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4.0 Overview Part 2

In the last section, against the background of the persecution which Paul and the Philippians shared together, we looked at one of the Bible's central themes of the Seed and the serpent.

You will recall that Paul tells the Philippians that unity is their best weapon and a signal to the enemy of the saints that his head will be crushed. As we start with the second chapter of Philippians we see Paul goes on to outline exactly how they are to express this unity together. We have seen that it was gospel-centric, a bi-product of the persecution they suffered. But it also needed *walking out* and here is where Paul gets practical in exactly *how* they should walk it out: -

- i. Never let selfish ambition be your motive in doing anything.
- ii. Instead consider others better than yourselves.

We shall come back to this last statement in section 6 where we look at key passages in depth. So here is Paul's imperative and rather than just giving them this command he shows them the means by which they will follow this directive in daily living and what they can expect as a result, as we shall see below.

4.1 The Seed (2⁶⁻¹¹)

Paul brings the Philippians back to their roots, their core, the reason they find themselves in their present situation and in unison and fellowship with each other: - the Christ, Jesus. It is no coincidence that God had promised a Seed. He is the promised Seed and as Paul had told the church in Rome only a few years earlier¹ Jesus was the firstborn among many brothers. This happened through his planting into the ground. In other words he was the first to be truly re-born into a glorified body and was a guarantee of the harvest to come.

4.1.1 Unless a Grain of Wheat Falls²

Paul's directive to the Saints is inextricably linked to the following section, which some believe was a hymn about Jesus, from Paul's time. Why should Paul start talking about Jesus' death and resurrection all of a sudden? The answer lies in the theme of the Seed again. As we have said the fact that Jesus was the promised Seed in Genesis, refers to the genealogical line of Jesus



¹ Romans 8²⁹

² NASB translation of John 12²⁴

which Matthew and Luke take time to lay out for us, but it also meant that like any seed, its true power is seen when it is buried in the ground³.

*“Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me’”*⁴

So what has this to do with the Believers’ unity? Paul was showing them how to walk it out, by following Jesus’ example as the Seed buried in the ground, dying to all personal ambition, giving up rights and instead looking to serve others and lay our lives down. In response to this, God will raise us up like Jesus. It is only by letting go of ourselves and our own interests are they truly served. At this point turn to the A3 pull-out entitled **“Unless a Grain of Wheat Falls”** you should have with these notes (This is in Appendix Four, but you may wish to insert this here in your folder for convenience).

4.1.2 Firstfruits of the Harvest

Remember we noted earlier how God has designed everything around us in the natural world in all its splendour to first of all tell us something about him, to communicate some spiritual truth and secondly to perform its design function.

The Seed was thus designed to tell us about death and resurrection, ultimately of Christ, the promised Seed. It was God who taught Adam how to farm the land - anthropologists know that farming originated in an area of Europe now known as Turkey, which is almost certainly the site of the original Garden of Eden (being the tributary for the four great rivers)⁵. Later we find Israel instructed to dedicate the firstfruits of every harvest to God, who in turn promised to bless the rest of the harvest⁶.

... Cross Reference

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those

³ This is one of the aims of this module - to make links to other parts of the WORD of God, which illuminate the context we are expounding - this is *not* the same as setting out to study a specific topic and then finding supporting Scriptures for that topic. What we are doing here is digging into the text drawing on other parts of the WORD of God to help us follow Paul’s line of thought - this is digging deep! (cf. Appendix Three “Digging Deep into the WORD of God”)

⁴ John 12²³⁻²⁶

⁵Endnotes

Up until recently as the 1930s many anthropologists worked under evolutionary assumption that farming originated in various parts of the world as men evolved. However it has now been accepted that farming actually started in one place, where there was an alluvial plateau which provided an extremely richly nourished soil, watered from below the ground and fertilised by the volcanic rock nearby. It is in this region that the oldest farming tools have been found over 30,000 remains of domesticated animals, including dogs, cats, sheep and cows!!

⁶ Exodus 23¹⁴⁻¹⁶

who have fallen asleep.”

Galatians 2:20

It is against this cultural-religious background that Paul talks about Christ being the firstfruits of those who are dead. He was like those firstfruits of a harvest, given over wholly to God. He was raised from the dead and is therefore a guarantee of a bumper harvest, or as Paul puts it to the church in Rome, the firstborn among many brethren⁷, the beginning of a new race of men re-born from above, by the Holy Spirit.

4.1.3 Six Steps Into the Nature of Man (2⁶⁻⁸)

It is perhaps arguable how many steps into which we divide this section, however six is the number of man in the WORD of God. He was created on the sixth day and throughout the WORD of God human effort is represented by this number. In fact this is the reason why the number of the Beast in Revelation is 666, for as it says⁸ this is *man's number*.

So we find here that the pre-incarnate Christ takes six steps down into the nature of and predicament of man – to the point of death. And it is not without importance that Paul describes the *kind* of death that Jesus submitted himself to:

-

- Roman View

The Romans reserved this kind of death for non-citizens of the Empire. It was the death of a common criminal with all the social stigma attached thereto. Jesus was being marked out as a non-citizen, disowned by Jew and Gentile (represented here by the Romans) alike, in order that we could become citizens of the kingdom of heaven⁹.

- Jewish View

The Jews on the other hand regarded death on a cross (or more accurately a stake¹⁰) as a curse in accordance with the law. Jesus was taking on the curse of man's nature and predicament. Adam and Eve subjected themselves to a curse through their disobedience and now Jesus was taking that curse on himself, so that we could in exchange enjoy every blessing of obedience¹¹. This is the argument Paul puts to the

⁷ Romans 8²⁹

⁸ Revelation 13¹⁸

⁹ Ephesians 3¹⁹

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 21²³

¹¹ Deuteronomy 28

Galatians in explaining why religious observance to the law is not the way to salvation¹².

He then takes a seventh step into the place of the dead where no man could have followed, for seven is God's number, the number of completion¹³. Jesus was able to descend into this place **and** return again, because although he took the sin of the world and all of God's anger he was still an innocent man.

4.1.4 Six Steps Into the Nature of God (2⁸⁻¹¹)

You will note from the aforementioned insert that we have also traced six steps *out* of Man's situation into the nature of God. Now remember, if we go back to the context we started this section with Paul talking about their unity and living for one another – he urges them the best way to do this is to be motivated and led by Christ's example.

... Cross Reference

“For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?”

Isaiah 40:14

“But we have the mind of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 2:16

We are called to follow him in all things, even into death! We are called to die a spiritual death – to kill off that old man corrupted by sin and to be risen again with a new heart (cf. 3.1.3) – not just once but day by day. However not only are we to follow him into death, but to follow in back to the Godhead, as Peter tell us,

*“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the **divine nature** and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”¹⁴*

So as we can see from Paul's *hymn* how Christ is given back from his Father everything he willingly laid down, so we also will go through the same as Christ – in all things we follow him. We too are raised, given his authority as believers, to put all things under our feet, called to be rulers in the age to come and honoured as co-heirs with Christ.

¹² Galatians 3¹³⁻¹⁴

¹³ Seven days in a week when God declared his work finished. There are seven colours in the perfect spectrum, seven notes in the piano scale, the seven-fold Spirit of God etc.

¹⁴ 2 Peter 1⁴

4.1.4 The Whole Package (2⁶⁻¹¹)

Both halves of this great equation are equally important as each other. Often believers can get caught up in *either* the steps down, focussing on death of self, *or* the steps up, focussing on dominion, blessing and honour. It is important we don't become polarised as believers into either of these.

Unfortunately it can often be the mature believers, looking to go deeper into the things of God, who can become in their zeal focussed on the death of self exclusively – a sole focus in this direction was something men and women of God in ages gone by (such as the Puritans, Mystics and the Plymouth Brethren) were at times *pre-occupied* by.

In the recent past, there have been some who have grasped through faith the wonderful exaltation for us as we follow Christ through the upwards steps, such as the healing available in the atonement¹⁵ and the freedom from poverty¹⁶. Sadly, some of these Christians have done so forgetting the steps down so that the message of the Cross becomes a lopsided one of pure blessing without any cost.

The truth of course, is that it costs you everything you are, if like Paul you truly lay yourself down (we shall come on to that in 4.2), but in return we can truly rise with Christ to a place of victory.

This mistake is not limited to just this issue. There are many other *issues* in the church today which can for some become their preoccupation instead of the propagation of the gospel and exaltation of the king (extension of his kingdom). God does not want us to get side-tracked (remember the serpent's tricks here!) as he does not want us to miss anything – he wants us to have the whole package!

“The Name” (v.9)

Often the meaning of this verse has been remembered in such a way as to say that God gave Jesus a name above every name and this name **is** Jesus, because in the next verse he says at the name of **Jesus** every knee would bow.

However the Greek is not structured this way. In verse 10 Paul is not telling us that this name is Jesus, but he is saying that at this name – which Jesus has been given – every knee will bow, this name was ...

¹⁵ Matthew 8¹⁶⁻¹⁷

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 8⁹

“not ‘a name’ but ‘the Name’. The Definite article appears in the Greek text and refers to a particular name. The title, THE NAME, is a very common Hebrew title, denoting office, rank, dignity.” [Wuest]

Group Activity

We have continued our theme regarding the Seed and how we are seed like Christ and follow him in all things.

Breaking down into small groups of four or five, look at the six steps down into manhood and the six steps back up into Godhood and try to think of any ways in which we can identify with Christ in those steps.

If you can think of Scriptural references in each case, that would be even better!

[Suggested answers are contained in the A3 pull-out – Appendix Four]

4.2 The Stars (2¹²⁻¹⁶)

Now we come to the next section, which follows on from all that Paul that has been saying – how do we know that? It’s the use of the word *therefore* - a good technique is to ask yourself when you see the word *therefore*, is posing the question to yourself ‘what is it there for?’

In this case it is there because Paul is saying in light of all I have been telling you here’s how you need to live. Again, he throws in some more imagery for us, drawn from God’s world and consistently used the same way throughout the WORD of God – the Stars.



We shall come back later in our studies (Section 6) to the imperative to work out their salvation with fear and trembling; for now we are concerned with this image Paul draws to the Philippians’ attention – being like the stars in the universe ... being like them how?

4.2.1 Sun, Moon and Stars



Let's use the law of biblical first mention¹⁷ to see when stars are first mentioned. We find this in Genesis, where we find them revealed¹⁸ by God. Here we find the Hebrew word for *lights* which is the same Greek equivalent word Paul uses to the Philippians, translated in the NIV as stars. Nevertheless it was the Greek word commonly used for stars. It does not matter much because in terms of Biblical symbols the sun, moon and stars are often used together.

In his book *Through New Eyes*¹⁹, Jordan points out that if we compare verses 14 and 16 in Genesis we can identify the literary device known as a *chiasm*²⁰. The use of chiasm here helps us draw out the particular symbolic associations of sun, moon and stars: -

- A (v.14) Let them be for signs
 - B (v.14) And for festival times²¹
 - C (v.14) And for the days and years
 - C (v.16) The greater light to govern the day
 - B (v.16) Also the lesser light to govern the night
- A (v.14) The stars also

So we see the stars (A) being related to signs (A). They have traditionally been used and misused for this (astrology) down through the ages. The moon (B) relating to festival times (B) which in Hebrew history governed the Israelite calendar. Thirdly the sun (C) relating to days and years (C).

4.2.2 Lights

The first thing about these astral bodies is that they are lights reflecting the glory of God. This is why the Apostle John said,

*“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”*²²

If we are walking in the light then we shall shine like stars, for again as John says,

*“... the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining”*²³

¹⁷ cf. Appendix Three “Digging Deep into the WORD of God”

¹⁸ A common misconception in reading the creation narrative is that the sun, moon and stars were created *after* the earth. You should note that the narrative comes from the perspective of the earth always, as if someone were observing it from the surface (Moses perhaps in vision received from God?). In verses 14-16 of Genesis 1, we find the use of the Hebrew historic sense, which is a ‘fact accomplished’ sense. It means that the sun, moon and stars were already there, but you could not see them before the fourth day of creation – they were just obscured from view, by bands of steam and cloud. This accords with what Scientists tell us about the need of the first baby plant life for the protection provided by opaque light – made possible by the thick steamy atmosphere.

¹⁹ *Through New Eyes*, Jordan J B © 1999, Wibpf and Stock Publishers, Eugene OR, USA.

²⁰ Chiasm is a literary device in which parallel ideas or terms are presented in a sandwich form (ABCDDCBA) instead of normal parallelism (AABBCCDD).

²¹ This is the more accurate translation of the Hebrew word *Mow'ed*, often translated as *seasons*

²² 1 John 1⁵

²³ 1 John 1⁸



We are destined to shine like this even when this world has passed away, reflecting the glory of God for eternity,

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."²⁴

Again Isaiah uses this same word Mow`ed,

*"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your **light**, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."²⁵*

4.2.3 Signs

Secondly we find the stars related to signs or symbols. All created things point back to God, but we are to live our lives as open books, as readable signs pointing to our Redeemer. The Singer-Songwriter, Steven Curtis Chapman, has a line in one of his songs about *living out loud* – and this is exactly what is wrapped up in the concept of being signs to the world around us. Our lives should speak of him and when people spend time with us they should be experiencing Christ through us, as he dwells in us by his Holy Spirit²⁶.

4.2.4 Rulers

The third element in these heavenly bodies with which we believers are associated is that of *ruling*. We saw how they govern the days and the years. In fact the heavenly bodies, Scientists tell us do indeed govern the earth through gravity and the composition of the stars (from which came the nucleic acids and materials to make man). The emphasis of these symbols in the Bible is on rule and throughout the WORD of God, *rulers* in general are symbolised by the heavenly bodies. The prophets often see the *sun*, *moon* and *stars* falling to the earth and this is often mistaken for the end of the world, but in often case actually refers to the end of an empire of earthly rulership²⁷. For example: -

"See, the day of the LORD is coming - a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light."²⁸

This appears to be the end of the world, but if we look at the context we find firstly that this was a Prophecy against Babylon. So it is talking primarily about

²⁴ Matthew 13⁴³

²⁵ Isaiah 60¹⁻³

²⁶ John 14²³

²⁷ See also Daniel 8¹⁰, Amos 5²⁶, Revelation 8¹⁰⁻¹²,12¹

²⁸ Isaiah 13⁹⁻¹⁰

the fate of Babylon. In fact we find in verse 17 that God stirs up the Medes against them. What God is saying is that Babylon's lights are going to go out!

So we are called to be rulers like the lights in the heavens. All things have been put under our feet, as well as Christ's, we are told by Paul in his letter to the Colossians²⁹. Although we shall rule and reign with Christ in the age to come, our rule begins in the here and now. This is why Lordship is so important in our lives – we can see the general principle here in Paul's hymn: -

THE MORE YOU HUMBLE YOURSELF BEFORE GOD THE MORE HE EXALTS YOU!

This is why when the mother of James and John approached Jesus to ask that her sons sit at Jesus' right and left in his kingdom, he did not respond by telling his disciples that it was wrong to want to be the greatest in the kingdom of God. Instead he tells them: -

"... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."³⁰

4.3 The Sacrifice (2¹⁶⁻¹⁸)

In the next few verses we find Paul coming back to the language of sacrifice.

4.3.1 Presentation Before the King

We find here in verse 15, an echo of an earlier thought from the first chapter³¹ - the saints in Philippi are Paul's offering to God - *pure* and *blameless*. Let's look back at the earlier thought:

"so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ."

The word used for *pure* here is *Heilikrines* which is an interesting word. It most likely derived from two other Greek words: -

Heile - meaning the Sun's ray

Krinein - meaning to judge

Putting these two together, it builds a picture for us of something that is able to stand up to scrutiny under the intense light of the sun, without any flaw appearing.

²⁹ Colossians 2⁶

³⁰ Matthew 20^{26b-28}

³¹ Philippians 1¹⁰



4.3.2 The Language of Sacrifice

Paul goes on to use what can appear to be curious language in verse 17. Once again it echoes an earlier thought in chapter one³², which only really comes out in the Greek as Barclay explains: -

*“the words Paul uses for to **begin** (*enarchomai*) and for to **complete** (*epiteleo*) are technical terms for the beginning and the ending of a sacrifice.”³³*

The above words used by Paul (in verse 6 of the first chapter) were taken from the culture into which Paul was writing and so would be regarded as every day words³⁴. Turning back to verse 17, Paul once again draws upon the language of sacrifice in verse 17 of the second chapter. The two words he uses this time are:-

Spendo - (often translated as *libation*) referring to a drink offering that is poured out upon the sacrifice itself. A cup of wine poured out as an offering to the gods, as a kind of grace before and after meat³⁵.

Thusia - a sacrifice.

What Paul is saying here is humbling to say the least! The drink offering to which he refers is his own violent death as a martyr. When he wrote to Timothy, a few years later during his second imprisonment in Rome, it is likely that Paul knew he was destined for the executioner’s block for decapitation: -

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.”³⁶

Here is what is humbling: this sacrifice he considers just the drink offering on the greater sacrifice made by the Philippians. As Wuest comments: -

³² Philippians 1⁶

³³ *Letter to the Philippians*: Barclay, William; © 1975 The Westminster Press, Philadelphia. Barclay adds: “A torch was lit from the fire on the altar and then dipped into a bowl of water to cleanse it with its sacred flame; and with the purified water the victim and the people were sprinkled to make them holy and clean. Then followed what was known as the **euphemia**, the sacred silence, in which the worshipper was meant to make his prayers to his god. Finally a basket of barley was brought, and some grains of the barley were scattered on the victim, and on the ground round about it. These actions were the **beginning of the sacrifice**, and the technical term for **making this beginning** was the verb *enarchesthai* which Paul uses here. The verb used for **completing the whole ritual of sacrifice** was the verb *epitelein* which Paul uses here for to **complete**. Paul’s whole sentence moves in an atmosphere of sacrifice. Paul is seeing the life of every Christian as a sacrifice ready to be offered to Jesus Christ. It is the same picture as he draws when he urges the Romans to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”

³⁴ i.e., vernacular

³⁵ Pouring out as a drink offering refers to the topping off of an ancient animal sacrifice. The offerer poured wine either in front of or on top of the burning animal and the wine would be vaporized. That steam symbolized the rising of the offering to the deity for whom the sacrifice was made (cf. Exodus 29³⁸⁻⁴¹; 2 Kings 16¹³; Jeremiah 7¹⁸; Hosea 9⁴).

³⁶ 2 Timothy 4⁶

“What humility for the great apostle to rejoice at the fact that some day he would be the lesser part of the sacrifice poured out upon the major part, the Philippians’ Christian testimony and service³⁷ to God.”³⁸

4.4 The Servants (2¹⁹⁻³⁰)

As we have seen, in order to practicalise his call to unity in their fight against the enemy, Paul has urged the saints in Philippi into selfless service of the message of God through Jesus, the Christ.

He started by showing them the ultimate example and the steps³⁹ they had gone through to rid themselves of their old nature and become partakers in the divine nature⁴⁰. He then tells them what sort of examples they should be now that they have been raised as conquerors with Christ and seated in heavenly places with him⁴¹. He then briefly referred to his own sacrifice and now we see here in these following verses he shows them the examples set by his dearly loved co-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus which they can emulate.

 **We need to realise that we are ALL leaders in some form or another by position and/or example.**

Now at this stage there is something important for us to note: both of these men were leaders in the churches by position or example. Not only that, they were also right hand men to Paul in their support to him – this means we can learn a lot from them. We need to come to terms with the fact that we are all leaders in some form or another by position and/or example. We also find ourselves in the position of supporting those responsible for us in leadership. In other words we have to learn to serve and to lead ... often at the same time!

Like everything else in this divine God-breathed letter, the aspects of each of these servants Paul highlights is with purpose. Let’s start by looking at Paul’s description of Timothy ...

4.4.1 Unique (v.20)

The first thing Paul tells us about Timothy here is that he has no one else like him. Timothy is unique. This description tells us something about Paul and something about Timothy. Firstly it is a testimony to Paul that he recognised the individuality of those who served with him. Secondly – he wasn’t saying that no one else was

³⁷ The word *service* is from a Greek word used of the religious service of the Old Testament priests.

³⁸ Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: Wuest, Kenneth S © 1942 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

³⁹ Philippians 2⁵⁻¹¹

⁴⁰ 2 Peter 1⁴

⁴¹ Ephesians 2⁶

as good as Timothy, but that no one else was *like* him. Timothy stood as his own man, not in Paul's or anyone else's image.

🤔 Do we “box in” and pigeon-hole our leaders?

What are the implications for us? We should learn to stand in our own right as individuals and not try to be a clone of anyone else. Also we should in turn not try to put our leaders in a box and limit them in this way – they are all unique in their gifting and ministry. If we receive from them this way we shall be truly more blessed than otherwise.

4.4.2 Shepherd (vv. 20-21)

The next thing Paul says of Timothy is that he takes a genuine interest in the welfare of the Philippians. He truly had their best interests at heart and in this respect Paul entrusted these saints at Philippi – so dear to Paul, to Timothy's care.

Do we allow our leaders to shepherd us? Do we treat them as if they have our interests at heart? Or do we stray and wander off on our own? Like the Shepherd and his sheep, our leaders may often lead us away from pitfalls and traps if we let them do so.

🤔 Do we let our shepherds... shepherd us?

Consider the context of the letter again and remember Paul's words of the other preachers who were doing so out of false motives. Here Timothy is contrasted with such men – his priorities were not self-serving but instead, serving the work of the gospel and shepherding his sheep⁴².

4.4.3 Tested and Proven (v.22)

Timothy had been faithful in Paul's service and so he knew Timothy would also be faithful with the Philippians. Timothy, like every leader must be tested, for it is through testing that character is produced.

Timothy was with Paul during his imprisonment⁴³ in Rome. He was also with him in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, Ephesus. He co-authored the letters: 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians and Philippians. There can be no doubt of Timothy's proven service.

⁴² John 21¹⁶

⁴³ Philippians 1¹ and Colossians 1¹

... Cross Reference

“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Romans 5:3-4

We find later in Paul’s first letter to Timothy that he specifies Overseers and Deacons should not be recent converts, which is not, as some have mistaken it, a ban on young men being put in positions of responsibility but those *young in the faith*⁴⁴. Why? Because testing is an important part in those that lead. They need to display the fruit of faithfulness even through the times of testing in their life – it qualifies them to come alongside us in such times to encourage us.

4.4.4 Faithful Son (v.22)

We should see our leaders in turn being shepherded and fathered themselves. Do we see such influences upon them? It demonstrates humility and a teachable spirit. Throughout all this time there can be no doubt that the infectious anointing upon Paul was imparted to him as it was passed from Elijah to Elisha – this is another aspect of spiritual fathering, which we looked at earlier. There is a transmission from the man or woman of God to those they “father” in the faith. We should see it in our leaders and we should see it in our own lives both in terms of fathering and being fathered.

Are we too old to be sons and too young to be fathers?

This process should not stop as we grow older but should continue even as we mature. Timothy was a son to Paul and comparatively young in light of the responsibility entrusted to him by Paul, but we find again in his first letter to Timothy Paul tells Timothy not to let others hold his comparative youth against him. Instead he encouraged him to teach, command and lead the people by example in his speech, life, love, faith and purity⁴⁵. Let this be an encouragement to those who are not advanced in years but are pressing onto maturity. Seek to be fathered and remember this does not stop you from simultaneously fathering and leading others, far from it – it qualifies you to do so!

4.4.5 Blessing to All (v.23)

⁴⁴ 1 Timothy 3⁶

⁴⁵ 1 Timothy 4¹¹⁻¹²

In verse 23 Paul says, *I hope therefore to send him ...* - remember what we do when we see the word *therefore*, we ask what is it there for? In this case Paul is saying in light of the things he has been saying about Timothy, he will send him to the Philippians because he will be a blessing to them. Timothy was not just being sent to gather news for Paul. Timothy was sent by Paul as an emissary to Thessalonica, Corinth and Philippi.

This brings us back to Paul's statement in verse 26 of the first chapter concerning the joy of the Philippians overflowing on account of his presence - he had the same confidence in Timothy. Do we have that confidence about ourselves, that we can bless others at every gathering of the saints? Do we see ourselves as a source of blessing? This is not self-centred or big-headed - far from it. It is actually the servant's heart to recognise that we bless others because Jesus lives within us; the Spirit of God in us can reach out to others' hearts, if we will allow him to use us. When we come together, if instead of focussing on how we feel about the meeting or any problems or situations we may face, we went solely to bless others, things would change around us rapidly!

Turning to Epaphroditus we see Paul now lay out things that these wonderful servants do ...

4.4.6 Surrounded by Peers (v.25)

Paul's first description of Epaphroditus is that of brother, not son (as with Timothy) which once again is pertinent. Paul's relationship with this servant of God was different; he was viewed more as a brother, perhaps a peer? In any case Paul demonstrates an important principle here, which is that leaders should have peers or brothers alongside them.



We find throughout the New Testament the pattern for government within the church was plural. Churches always had elders rather than one elder. In fact prophets and apostles also worked in conjunction with each other. This created accountability amongst them and safety in collective wisdom and discernment.

4.4.7 Sharing the Load (v.25)

Paul's next description of this great servant of God was fellow-worker, because Paul recognised that not everything depended upon him. He did not *own* the work of the gospel, but shared the load with other men willingly. Again this is another quality we should look for in our leaders. This is not one man's show, it is the work of the Lord. Paul understood this which is why we found earlier Paul talking about his own fate being weighed up in terms of what would be beneficial for the Philippians and what would prosper the gospel (cf. section 3.3.4).

4.4.8 Watching Each Other's Backs (v.25)

Paul's third description is *fellow soldier*. You will recall how we noted at the start of our studies that the background to this church was in part being a Roman Colony with semi-retired soldiers living there. It is likely, as we have said, that this is one of the reasons for Paul's use of this type of language. Once again Paul was not just reeling off a list of nice things about Epaphroditus, he mentions this quality for a reason as he was moved by the Spirit of God to do so.



Obviously Paul was alluding to the fact that they were fighting for the truth of the gospel to be heard, but remember that the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to be with Paul to stay with him. Paul was sending him back and he wanted the Philippians to know that this was not because Epaphroditus had failed him in any way – quite the contrary. He had nearly lost his life in the work of the gospel (v.30).

In the early nineties there was a book written by the author Stephen Ambrose concerning a Company of paratroopers within the 506th Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division of the United States Army. The book was called *Band of Brothers* and it told the story of E Company led by an extraordinary leader who inspired loyalty and devotion in his men to each other. This trust was so strong that many who were injured during the D Day invasion at Normandy and were subsequently hospitalised, deliberately left the hospitals early, often without permission, so that they could go back into action with their own Company rather than any other Company. This bond of trust was forged in battle and meant that they knew everyone in the Company would watch their backs in the heat of conflict – they literally put their lives into each other's hands. Here is Ambrose's account of one such member of Easy Company: -

“Popeye Wynn, who had been shot in the butt helping to destroy the [gun] battery at Brécourt Manor on June 6, had been operated on and was recuperating in a hospital in Wales when he was told that if he was absent from his company for more than ninety days, when he was listed fit for combat, he would be assigned to a different outfit. Wynn wanted none of that. He persuaded a sergeant who was in charge of releasing the patients to send him back to Aldbourne with light duty papers. He arrived on September 1, threw away the papers, and rejoined the 3^d platoon.

He was not fully recovered. During the flight to Holland, he stood up in the back of the stick, as he was too sore to sit. But he was there, where he wanted to be, going into combat with his buddies in Easy Company.”⁴⁶

This should help us understand the bond forged between Paul and those who served with him, be it the Philippians, Timothy or in this case Epaphroditus.

⁴⁶ *Band of Brothers: Ambrose, S E; © 1997 Simon & Schuster, London.*



4.4.9 A Heart for the People (v.26)

Another humbling moment lies in this passage for us – Epaphroditus has such a heart for the Philippians that he was distressed not about being close to death but about the Philippians’ distress over this! How incredible!

Paul employs the same phrase he has used of himself in the first chapter (v.8) *he longs for you*, he tells the Philippians. Surely this is humbling when we are caught up with our own troubles. If I am ill and others find out, do I appreciate their concern more than I care about any distress my condition may bring them? Once again Paul is showing us how close was the Covenant bond between the Philippians and those who ministered among them.

4.4.10 Honoured (v.29-30)

Lastly we have an instruction to the Philippians AND US! Paul tells the Philippians,

“Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.”⁴⁷

This special honour Paul has already accorded to Epaphroditus earlier in verse 25, where he says that he had looked after Paul’s needs. In our English translations we can miss it - he uses a special Greek word, *leitourgos*⁴⁸ often translated as *minister*. In the Greek version of the Old Testament (Septuagint - LXX⁴⁹), this word was used for the priestly service to God and men. In Hebrews it is used of Christ’s priestly ministry in the heavenly tabernacle⁵⁰. However remember Paul is writing to a gentile group of believers and therefore imports the Greek connotations into his letter to them,

“In secular Greek this was a magnificent word. In the ancient days in the Greek cities there were men who, because they loved their city so much, at their own expense undertook certain great civic duties. It might be to defray the expenses of an embassy, or the cost of putting on one of the dramas of the great poets, or of training the athletes who would represent the city in the games, or of fitting out a warship and paying a crew to serve in the navy of the state. These men were the supreme benefactors of the state and they were known as leitourgoi.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Philippians 2³⁰

⁴⁸ from *léitos* = of the people + *érgon* = work

⁴⁹ Septuagint (sometimes abbreviated LXX) is the name given to the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures. The Septuagint has its origin in Alexandria, Egypt and was translated between 300-200 BC. Widely used among Hellenistic Jews, this Greek translation was produced because many Jews spread throughout the empire were beginning to lose their Hebrew language. The process of translating the Hebrew to Greek also gave many non-Jews a glimpse into Judaism. According to an ancient document called the *Letter of Aristeas*, it is believed that 70 to 72 Jewish scholars were commissioned during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus to carry out the task of translation. The term “Septuagint” means seventy in Latin, and the text is so named to the credit of these 70 scholars.

⁵⁰ Hebrews 8²

⁵¹ Letter to the Philippians: Barclay, William; © 1975 The Westminster Press, Philadelphia.



Epaphroditus is perhaps a character with which many of us can identify more readily. He was not named as a great Apostle, Elder or Teacher. However he was a faithful servant and in this Paul equates Epaphroditus' work with his own, worthy of honour amongst the people of God. We must ensure we are honouring the servants of God amongst us.

Once again Paul has brought us back to the theme of an offering to God, a sacrifice acceptable to him on the day of the LORD – Epaphroditus was such a living sacrifice. No matter what our “ministry” may be in the body, its acceptability as a sacrifice before God depends not upon our fame or influence, but instead upon our devotion to him and our faithfulness to use the gifts he has put within us.

Group Activity

We have spent time looking at these great men of God, who laboured with Paul: - Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Break down into small groups of four or five.

- Half of the groups are to consider and list what other characteristics they note in others in the church, which bless the body individually or as a whole.
- Half of the groups are to consider and list what characteristics they themselves excel in that bless the body individually or as a whole.

4.5 The Serpents (3¹⁻⁹)

Now at this point in our reading of this letter, one might be guided by the chapter divisions into thinking that Paul is starting a brand new section of his letter.

In fact many theologians believe that he intended to write verse 1 of chapter 3 just before his closing salutations (because of the use of the word *finally*), but received news of Judaizers amongst the Philippians and decided to tag on verse 2 and those following. In fact some theologians go as far as to think this was actually the start of a brand new letter, which later editors decided to bolt on or insert. In light of such theories it is always best for us to remind ourselves that it is divinely inspired Scripture⁵², as Paul later tells Timothy⁵³, in our hands. Everything is where it is by divine design.

⁵² The word for God-breathed, *theopneustos* above is often translated as divinely inspired. It is however a combination of two words *theos* meaning God and *pneustos* which is believed to be a derivative of *pneo* meaning to breathe hard or to blow. Essentially the phrase used by Paul in his letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 3¹⁶⁻¹⁷) in the NIV is a literal translation: Scripture is God's breath on the page! Scripture is ex-spired by God.

⁵³ 2 Timothy 3¹⁶⁻¹⁷



However it is our hope that the student has been learning to ask questions of the text (see Appendix Three) and at this point we should ask ourselves *why does Paul now start talking about dogs?!* - what Paul has to say actually flows on from all we have been looking at. Let's look at how ...

4.5.1 A Subtle Attack

Let's recap on our journey through this letter so far. You will remember how Paul was talking (in chapter one) about his and the Philippians' situation - the serpent was once again going after the Seed and Paul told them their best weapon was their unity. That unity was dependent upon their willingness to lay down their lives. Paul spends time showing them models of this servant-leadership, starting with Christ himself, then going on to others.

That brings us up to this point where Paul now shows them the opposite model against the background situation of the Judaizers⁵⁴, who were obviously trying to persuade the saints into their doctrine of deception. The Judaizers were a specific group trying to persuade Christian converts into becoming full proselytised⁵⁵ Jews before they could then accept Christ.

The Philippians had suffered for years a full front assault by way of persecution and now they were also the subject of attempted deception from the serpent as well - an attempt to get in the back door. All that Paul was teaching them was an antidote to this deception. This reminds us of that great description of the saints in the Revelation given to John,

*"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."*⁵⁶

They were living as sacrifices to God, laying down their lives like the seed in the ground and this was what guarded them against deception.

4.5.2 A Dog's Life?

It may seem a bit strange to you for Paul to use this description. After all, surely dogs are man's best friend? This is a predominantly western view that was not of Paul's day. This is one of those things that needs some cultural background to help us understand the insult.

⁵⁴ The Judaizers were a Christian sect still adhering to the Jewish Law. Unwilling to see Judaism die out, the Judaizers adopted a legalistic idea of salvation. They insisted that no non-Jews could be saved without submitting to circumcision and observing the Law of Moses. It was the more zealous of the Judaizers who stirred trouble in Antioch and the new churches of Galatia.

⁵⁵ The English term "proselyte" occurs only in the New Testament where it signifies a convert to the Jewish religion (Matthew 23¹⁵; Acts 2¹¹; 65) who underwent the rite of circumcision and conformed to the precepts of the Jewish Law.

⁵⁶ Revelation 12¹¹

Although in contemporary western society a dog's life is one of ease, in Paul's time this was not the case. Dogs were animals that often lived in squalor, dismal poverty as a social pariah at the bottom of the social scale.

Since what they scavenged was often inadequate they would consume what was repulsive or unfit for human consumption. Dogs were seen as being indiscriminate in their diet, and like pigs, ritually unclean animals. Their willingness to eat human corpses was exploited uniquely by the book of Kings as a curse that comes upon wicked dynasts⁵⁷, one of the most well known examples being the fate of King Ahab's wife Jezebel⁵⁸.



So as you can imagine this was quite an insult that Paul was throwing at the Judaizers. He was calling them the lowest of the low. They were claiming to be the *circumcision*, i.e., the seed of Abraham through physical circumcision and were trying to convince Christians that they had to become children of God through being proselytes before they had a hope of accepting Jesus as their Saviour. There was a Rabbinic saying: -

“The nations of the world are like dogs”

Ironically it is doubtful that all of these Judaizers were actually Jews in the first place, for Paul later says that he has more to boast about because he was actually born a Jew, whilst it is possible that many of these Judaizers were fanatical gentile proselytes. So Paul was actually saying to them that the very thing they were accusing the Christians of being - aliens to the promises and second class citizens begging for scraps at the table of fully observant Jews - is exactly what they themselves were! J B Lightfoot captures the spirit of Paul's statement really well: -

“The herd of dogs which prowl eastern cities, without a home and without an owner, feeding on the refuse and filth of the streets, quarrelling among themselves, and attacking the passer-by, explain both applications of the image. To the Jew more especially the comparison of the heathen to a dog would commend itself, as describing his indiscriminate use of meats whether clean or not. Thus St Paul's language here is strikingly significant: - ‘They speak of themselves as God's children; they boast of eating at God's table; they reproach us as dogs, as foul and unclean as outcasts from the covenant, ... because we eat meat ... I reverse the image. WE are the children, for we banquet on the spiritual feast which God has spread before us: THEY are the dogs, for they greedily devour the garbage of carnal ordinances, the very refuse of God's table.’”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ 1 Kings 14¹¹; 16⁴; 21²³⁻²⁴; 2 Kings 9¹⁰⁺³⁶

⁵⁸ 2 Kings 9³⁰⁻³⁷

⁵⁹ The Epistles of St Paul, III The First Roman Captivity (I. Epistle to the Philippians): Lightfoot, J B © 1883 Macmillan and Co. London

Finally, to really sink the boot in to these dogs, Paul makes a play on words that does not come out in our English translations⁶⁰. He says they are *mutilators of the flesh*. He uses two Greek verbs which are very similar: -

- **Peritemnein** - to circumcise
- **Kataemnein** - to mutilate

Paul is saying that their physical circumcision in which they boast, is not a circumcision at all but a spiritual mutilation. This kind of mutilation was forbidden by the Mosaic law⁶¹. In writing to the Galatians with whom this deception had taken root, Paul went even further: -

“As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!”

Had they taken his advice the numbers in this sect may have dwindled!

4.5.3 The True Circumcision

In contradistinction to these dogs Paul lists three characteristics which distinguish us the true seed: -

- Worship by the Spirit of God
- Glory in Christ Jesus
- Put no confidence in the flesh

These stand in complete contradiction to the ways of the world, which John clearly lays out for us: -

*“For everything in the world--**the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does**--comes not from the Father but from the world.”⁶²*

The three characteristics of the world are highlighted above and accord with what we are told of the Tree of Knowledge in Genesis, which man was forbidden to eat from and represented independence from God: -

*“... the fruit of the tree was **good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, ...**”⁶³*

Again we have highlighted above the three aspects. To mark the distinction properly let us put them against each other: -

⁶⁰ Obviously this would be hilarious to Greek linguists.

⁶¹ Leviticus 21⁵

⁶² 1 John 2¹⁶

⁶³ Genesis 3^{6A}

The Way of the World

- *“The cravings of sinful man”*
- *“Good for food”*

The spirit of the world is to seek independence from God; everything is motivated from the self-serving sinful nature that drives man. He is a slave to sin and dominated by his nature within him.

The natural circumcision represents living by the flesh. Compare Paul's later statement concerning the “enemies of the Cross” in [Philippians 3¹⁹](#): -

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

- *“The lust of his eyes”*
- *“Pleasing to the eye”*

The spirit of this world always is taken up with the outward appearance – that which looks good. The builders of Babel said to

The Way of the Spirit

- *“Worship by the Spirit of God”*

Worship here can be taken as a metaphor for a life of worship (cf. Romans 12 – Living Sacrifices, our act of spiritual worship). The true circumcision do everything by the Spirit. We do everyday ordinary things by the Spirit of God and in his strength for we are Spiritual people by nature.

The phrase here in Philippians no doubt reminds us of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman about worshipping at Jerusalem. He says to her that Jerusalem represents the flesh, whilst the true people of God will not worship at a geographical location, but instead through the Spirit of God ([John 4²¹⁻²⁴](#)). Paul echoes this thought in writing to the Galatians, where he tells them that Hagar (representing slavery) corresponded to the city of Jerusalem below, whilst children of the promise were born to Jerusalem above ([Galatians 4²⁵⁻²⁶](#)).

- *Glory in Christ Jesus*

The word used here, Kauchaomai actually means to “glory in” something, in other words to put confidence in and boast of

themselves, “Come let us build a tower ... that we make a name for ourselves.” ([Genesis 11](#)). The emphasis is always on what looks good and powerful with the purpose of glorifying man, not God.

In a subtle way this crept into the hearts of the Pharisees who Jesus reprimanded for glorying in the outward appearances of people, such as almsgiving (which became regarded as almost synonymous with righteousness).

- *“Boasting of what he has and does”*
- *“Desirable for gaining wisdom”*

Essentially the result of the above is that man leans on his own understanding. The Tree of Knowledge represented independence from God and man chose (through Adam) to trust his own judgement instead of trusting God at his word on what was best for man.

Thousands of years later unredeemed man has learned nothing and seeks at every turn to claim glory for all his own achievements, reaching for the stars whilst he leaves war and famine on his own planet. His driving preoccupation being to prove that no God made this beautiful wonderful universe he is now standing on tiptoes to see.

something, or as in this case, someone – Christ Jesus⁶⁴.

The true circumcision do not build for themselves based on what looks good, but instead make their boast in all that Christ Jesus has achieved on their behalf.

- *Put no confidence in the flesh*

Paul lays out his own reasons for being able to claim righteousness – as he says a Hebrew of Hebrews. In Spiritual terms Paul is saying that he was royalty – the tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to David and with Judah formed the foundation for the restored nation after the captivity. The word he uses for zeal ([v.6](#)) was a technical term at the time for a strict Jew who was a member of the fanatical party among the Pharisees who called themselves Zealots.

Paul summarises all of that up in comparison to the righteousness which comes from Christ and the resulting relationship with him ([Philippians 3⁷⁻⁹](#)), using a Greek equivalent of an Anglo-Saxon swear word in common use in our society – such was the depth of the Holy Spirit-inspired disgust in his

⁶⁴ Note that where we see the designation Jesus Christ in the New Testament, it is reference to him as Messiah – i.e., Jesus [the] Christ (Christ meaning Messiah), with 135 occurrences (NIV). The designation Christ Jesus is instead a title, like HRH or as we saw in [Philippians 2⁹⁻¹⁰](#) a Name.



heart for the righteousness that comes from man – a stench in the nostrils of a truly holy God.

Following this Paul goes on to make, what some consider to be, one of the most unfathomable statements of his written corpus⁶⁵, which we shall come back to look at in our Key Passages section.

⁶⁵ Philipians 3¹⁰⁻¹¹