

March 28, 2021 Pastor Carl Durham's Bible Reading Notes

Introduction: The world tells us to hunker down and guard what is ours - (especially in days of pandemic and scarcity). The Philippians were in just this way tempted to put their own interests in front of the interests and needs of other believers in their church body. They were, after all, being persecuted intensely by the Romans empire. Philippi was a Roman colony, and their suffering is described as the very same suffering which Paul has suffered at the Romans hands (Philippians 1:29-30)! In such trials, the worldly mindset is, “every man for himself!”

To fight off such a selfish attitude, Paul urges this church to adopt the mind of Christ in Philippians 2:1-4. He then describes how Christ put *our interests* before His own in suffering even unto death the penalty due us for our sin (Philippians 2:5-11). But still the struggle to die to self and give up our own instinct for self-preservation is a real one. We are loath to trust God’s care for us to the point that we would really give ourselves away for other brothers and sisters in Christ. Let’s see this week how Paul in Philippians 2:14-18 once again wakes up this church to the danger of selfish mindsets which result in a bare and unfruitful profession of faith.

Mon/Tues: read Philippians 2:14-18 and Leviticus 23:9-14. In order to restrain the grumbling of the Philippian church in Philippians 2:14, Paul reminds them of the joy which God’s people are to have as they celebrate their status as “God’s first-fruits” of salvation. This was Paul’s joy – even as he suffered imprisonment for the sake of the Gospel! *He remembered how God used him to bring the Gospel first to the Philippians* when Paul crossed over the Aegean Sea into Europe, (Acts 16:11-15). The Philippians were the ‘first-fruits’ of Paul’s Gentile mission in Europe!

Well now, ask yourself: How were believers all through the Old Testament to give God proper thanks for the blessings of first-fruits, whether fruits of the agricultural harvest in Leviticus 23:9-14 or the spiritual fruit of newly converted believers – such as the Philippian church in Acts 16? The answer is that, along with other sacrificial elements such as a burnt offering and the wave offering of grain, there was to be a drink-offering of approximately one gallon of wine poured out on the other sacrifices as a libation of praise to God. This was a required part of the Festival of First-Fruits when Israel gave thanks to God for bringing them safely into the Promised Land. Before they could eat of the harvest of the Promised Land, they had to offer a drink-offering, along with the burnt offering, grain offering and wave offering (Lev. 23:12-14).

Now, see how this applies to the Philippians. When Paul warns them against grumbling as ungrateful for God’s blessings, the stakes are much higher than we might first imagine. Paul knows God has saved them, bringing them safely into union with Christ Jesus. *He* is their Promised Land. They are safe in Him. Why, Paul joins these Christians in this thankful first-fruit offering. He feels as if shares the Promised Land of being in Christ with the Philippians – even when he is in jail! How wrong it would be, therefore, for the Philippians to grumble against God’s provisions – when He has brought them into the Promised Land and provided all they need to live for His glory – just as Israel, when she first entered the Promised Land in Joshua 5, was able to enjoy the first crop ever harvested by Israel in Canaan – barley. And you can just imagine the joy as, for the first time, they celebrated with each other the Festival of First-fruits (Joshua 5:10-12)! No wonder Paul urges the church to whom he writes to share with him the same joy of knowing that God has chosen them to be His first-fruits – see Philippians 2:17-18.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that our Lord Jesus is the ‘First-Fruits’ of those risen from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)! We know that life forever with God in the Promised Land of Heaven is a sure thing – for we see that God the Father has already given life to His Son as the first part of the harvest! One day soon *we will be harvested and reaped into God’s barn in Heaven. What a joyful harvest that will be!* Sing about this in hymn # 715:

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*Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home!
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin:
God our Maker doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home!*

*For the Lord our God shall come,
And shall take His harvest home;
From His field shall purge away
All that doth offend that day:
Give His angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast;
But the fruitful ears to store
In His garner evermore.*

*We ourselves are God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown
Unto joy or sorrow grown.
First the blade and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear;
Grant, O Harvest Lord, that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.*

*Then, thou Church triumphant, come,
Bring the song of harvest-home;
All are safely gathered in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, for ever purified,
In God's garner to abide;
Come, ten thousand angels, come,
Raise the glorious harvest-home!*

Weds/Thurs: read Philippians 2:14-18. We may at first be shocked that Paul's concerns for the Philippians should include his fear that their sin could render his apostolic work of no effect in Philippians 2:16. Was Paul a fear-monger, who looked down on the profession of faith of others while strutting forth with absolute confidence *in his own reliability*? Remember how Peter lapsed into the sin of contradicting Christ? "Even if all others fall away, *I won't!*"

No, Paul is not looking down on the Philippians' spiritual commitment. For he knows the danger of all sin among believers, including the danger of sin in his own life. He is greatly concerned to remain personally vigilant, since in his own life, there is the danger of running in vain: *So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified* (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). Sober words! But what exactly does Paul mean?

Reformed Commentator Charles Hodge gives us the best answer as to how the Apostle could have an unbreakable assurance of God's saving work in his life, while at the same time having a trembling fear of what sin could do to his profession and Christian service. He translates 1 Cor. 9:27:

'He made these strenuous exertions, (as an Apostle and as a Christian), lest, having preached the gospel to others, he himself should become a reprobate, one rejected.'
(Hodge continues): "What an argument and what a reproof is this! The reckless and listless Corinthians thought they could safely indulge themselves to the very verge of sin, while this devoted apostle considered himself as engaged in a life-struggle for his salvation. This same apostle, however, who evidently acted on the principle that the righteous scarcely are saved, and that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, at other times breaks out in the most joyful assurance of salvation, and says that he was persuaded that nothing in heaven, earth or hell could ever separate him from the love of God. [Romans 8:38](#), [Romans 8:39](#). The one state of mind is the necessary condition of the other. It is only those who are conscious of this constant and deadly struggle with sin, to whom this assurance is given. In the very same breath Paul says, "O wretched man that I am;" and, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory," [Romans 7:24](#), [Romans 7:25](#). It is the indolent and self-indulgent Christian who is always in doubt."

Fri/Sat/Sun: As you think of Paul's sternly taking himself in hand, soberly reminding himself and us of the danger of sin in his own life, and in the lives of the Christians to whom he wrote, sing about the cost of such

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commitment – which God by His Spirit plans to work into all of us, not just into the lives of holy Apostles and saints. Here are some hymns that speak about our “pouring our lives out” as a sweet smelling sacrifice of our devotion to our Lord Jesus:

*Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.*

*Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.*

*Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.
(Trinity hymnal # 585)*

*In the hour of trial,
Jesus, plead for me,
Lest by base denial
I depart from Thee.
When Thou seest me waver,
With a look recall,
Nor for fear or favor
Suffer me to fall.*

*With forbidden pleasures
Would this vain world charm,
Or its sordid treasures
Spread to work me harm,
Bring to my remembrance
Sad Gethsemane,
Or, in darker semblance,
Cross-crowned Calvary.*

*If with sore affliction
Thou in love chastise
**Pour thy benediction
On the sacrifice;**
Then, upon thine altar
Freely offered up,
Though the flesh may falter,
Faith will drink the cup.*

(Trinity hymnal # 568)