

September 2018 Bible Reading Plan
Themes from
Paul's Letter to the Philippians



Philippians 1:27-2:4

1:27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

2:1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

September 2018 Bible Reading Plan

Philippians



As Pastor Chad preaches through Philippians, we will explore themes related to the passages on which he is preaching. The readings will attempt to complement, and perhaps re-emphasize, truths related to Pastor Chad's exposition of Paul's Letter to the Philippians. After all, you can't say everything that could be said about a book like this in even a rather extended series of messages delivered once a week. God's Word is rich, and because a single author is behind the human writers, it is consistent and complementary. By "complementary" I mean that although each part of the Word of God is unique in certain respects, the whole is consistent *because* it IS the Word of **GOD**, and one part is often illuminated by other parts, because you can't say everything that needs to be said in a relatively brief book, any more than you can say everything that needs to be said, or that you might want to say as a preacher, in one sermon, or several. So, devote yourself to the reading and exploration of the Word of God as we touch on themes related to this great book given us though the apostle Paul.

Bill Tyson

Read Philippians 1:12-18a.

To understand what we are doing this month, please read the brief message from Bill Tyson introducing this month’s readings.

Paul is writing from prison, and this passage clearly illustrates two aspects of WPC’s Vision Statement – actually, three.

1. First, what evidence do you see in this passage that Paul has “a passion for the preeminence of Christ in all of life and in all the world”? _____

2. Second, what evidence do you see that Paul has “a zeal for reaching and serving people and seeing them transformed into fully-devoted followers of our Lord Jesus Christ”? _____

But there is a third aspect of WPC’s Vision Statement that might not be quite so evident were it not for a book like Ephesians, which was also written from this same imprisonment. (Isn’t it interesting to see how God used even Paul’s imprisonments, not only to minister the gospel to those with whom he had contact, but to us through his letters. Paul’s imprisonment likely gave him time to write a book like Ephesians, his most systematic and panoramic exposition of “the whole counsel of God” (see Acts 20:17 & 27, the latter spoken to the Ephesian elders).

Read Acts 20:20-24 – Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders – and Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul’s most panoramic overview of God’s redemptive plan set forth in the gospel.

3. In light of those passages, and particularly Eph 1:6,12, & 14, how can you see in Philippians 1:12-18a Paul’s “passion for the glory of God”? _____

As a reminder, let me once again remind you of what is meant by “a passion for the glory of God.” We often think only of “a passion to glorify God” in the ways we live. That is part of it, but not all. By “a passion for the glory of God” we mean:

- a passion to know God as the glorious being that he is
- a passion to glorify him by the way we live, and
- a passion to declare his glory to the nations

For your Meditation and Prayer: In light of those three statements regarding “a passion for the glory of God” in WPC’s Vision Statement, one can see in Paul a man who has come to know God as the glorious being that he is, especially as seen in the redemptive plan and purpose of God to manifest the glory of his grace towards sinners whom he chose to save from this mass of fallen humanity through his Son Jesus Christ. He himself was gloriously converted by a sovereign act of God on the Damascus road (Acts 9), and gave himself to live for the glory of God in the proclamation of the gospel of grace, declaring God’s glory to the nations.

Psalm 96:1-9

Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!
For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!
Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!"

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect on these matters, and pray for yourself and for members of WPC that God may give us “a passion for the glory of God,” and may that, and “a passion for the preeminence of Christ,” be primary motivations for you to devote yourself to the reading and hearing of his Word.

Read Philippians 1:12-18a again.

One of Paul’s fundamental convictions was expressed in Romans 8:28 – “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” We often refer to that in reference to us as individuals, and I think that is appropriate, but perhaps sometimes a little narrow. God’s purposes for us may be related to his purposes for other believers in ways we may or may not see at all in this life. But in the case of our passage, the apostle Paul DID see a purpose for his sufferings, perhaps in multiple ways, but certainly here in a particular way.

1. What does Paul express as a purpose for his present imprisonment? _____

Beyond what Paul shared with the Philippians is what I mentioned yesterday – that God had purposes that extend to us – namely, giving us several letters from Paul’s hand that are rich with truths for us and our lives even today, because they were so superintended by the Spirit as to be the very Word of God.

2. Imagine that you were put in prison when you were trying to faithfully serve the Lord. What sort of thoughts do you think might go through your head? How do you think you would respond, and why? _____

Read Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 5, paragraphs 1 & 7 and Westminster Larger Catechism 45, the latter of which references Romans 8:28 as a footnote.

For your Meditation and Prayer: Rather than asking more questions today, reflect upon the above readings from the WCF and WLC, and the following quote from the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, and then pray for faith in these truths: “What is my only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.”

Tomorrow we’ll look at ways God uses adversities and trials to accomplish his purposes in our lives. But for now, PRAY, and ask the Lord for faith to trust his providential ordering of all things on our behalf and for our good and the good of his Church.

Read Romans 5:1-5 and James 1:2-4, keeping Philippians 1:12-18a in mind as you do. Today we are going to look at a few ways God uses trials and adversities to accomplish good in our lives. I'm going to simply list some texts, and have you read them to see if you can see what God is wanting to accomplish in lives through the particular trial or situation his people will face.

1. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 _____

2. Psalm 119:67 & 71 _____

3. Deuteronomy 8:1-6 _____

4. Hebrews 12:3-14 _____

5. Hebrews 5:8 _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: In addition to what you may have found in the passages above, reflect on how God develops in his children compassion for those who suffer (2 Cor 1:3-6), longsuffering and kindness, meekness (as in Numbers 12:1-8), patience, self-control, etc. Pray that the Lord will give you – and the rest of us – eyes to see what he might be wanting to develop in us through trials (whether our own or those of loved ones) and grace and strength to respond well, instead of our natural tendency to grumble and complain, or to become bitter and resentful at not being treated better as we think we should be, or want to be.

Read Philippians 1:12-18a again, this time with a view to those who have been stimulated to preach Christ while Paul is in prison.

Note that in verse 17 Paul speaks of “selfish ambition.” There is some debate about the Greek root word behind the Greek term translated “selfish ambition” here, largely because it was not a word used much before New Testament times. Some associate the word with a root that means “strife” or “quarreling.” Some associate it with another Greek word that was used earlier by Aristotle where it referred to some who tried to gain political office by suspect means, not to serve the state but to gain honor and wealth for themselves. Both suggestions, however, have to do with “self-interest” that leads to strife and quarreling and other divisive and evil things.

When I hear “selfish-ambition” as translated here in verse 17, I tend to think of what I would call “raw selfish-ambition,” like that of those who just want to get ahead of others for selfish gain, and who will do so by questionable means and at others’ expense. It isn’t always as obvious, however, which we’ll note September 25 of this month’s Bible Reading Plan. Here it has a tinge of that sort, and yet these still preach Christ, only with wrong motives, unlike others who preach Christ as “on the same team as Paul” – i.e., in the service of Christ and his interests, not to draw off others to themselves and away from Paul, nor to afflict Paul in any way. But let’s look at “raw selfish-ambition” today, because in life many of you face such, or have in the past.

The word translated “selfish ambition” here in Philippians 1:17 is found in Paul’s list of “the works of the flesh” (i.e., our fallen sinful nature) in Galatians 5:20 -- *Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

1. Note the words immediately around “rivalries,” which is the same word translated somewhat differently. What is a common characteristic of the words immediately around “rivalries,” and how serious a matter is it to evidence this sort of spirit? _____

The same Greek word is found in Romans 2:8 -- *Romans 2:6 He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

2. What is the difference in the orientation of those described in vs 7 and vs 8, and again, how serious is that difference? _____

Let's look at one more passage where the word is actually found twice – James 3:13-18 -- *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.* ¹⁴ *But if you have bitter jealousy and **selfish ambition** in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.* ¹⁵ *This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* ¹⁶ *For where jealousy and **selfish ambition** exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.* ¹⁷ *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.* ¹⁸ *And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

3. Describe how the spirit of vs 17 is different from that of verses 14-16 in your own words: _____

4. Describe the different results that issue from the two contrasting spirits: _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Most of us probably don't regard ourselves as "selfishly ambitious," but Paul and James both address that spirit in the context of the church, and both make it evident how destructive it is. Reflect on your own spirit, and pray that the Lord will search your heart and help you see whether there is some measure of that spirit in your own heart (Psalm 139:23-24). If so, confess it, and seek repentance for it, ask the Father to strengthen you by the Spirit so that your desire might be above all else to serve the interest of Christ. Pray the same for the rest of us, for we are not immune from our sinful nature, and need the Spirit to work in us his fruit.

If you would dig a little deeper, you might consider making time to read the following for illustrations of this "raw self-interest" of which I have spoken:

- Of Haman – Esther 3-7
- Of Absalom, one of David's sons – 2 Samuel 15 & 16:15-17:14
- Of Jesus' disciples in some measure – Mark 9:33-37 and 10:11-45

Read Philippians 1:12-18a once again.

James Stalker, a Scottish pastor and professor of the 1800s, once wrote of the apostle Paul: “Christianity obtained in Paul an incomparable Type of Christian Character. It already indeed possessed the perfect model of human character in the person of its Founder. But He was not as other men, because from the beginning He had no sinful imperfection to struggle with; and Christianity still required to show what it could make of imperfect human nature. Paul supplied the opportunity of exhibiting this. . . . Christianity got the opportunity in him of showing the world the whole force that was in it.” (*Life of Paul*, p 12).

I assume that God has called you, the reader, to be a Christian, a follower of Christ. There is great encouragement and challenge in the life of Paul – encouragement at what God’s Spirit can do with a sinner, and challenge because few, if any, have ever attained the level of conformity to Christ as he.

1. **Read Acts 9:10-22 and Luke 14:26-33.** How might Paul’s response to Ananias’s message relate to Luke 14:26-33? _____

2. If Paul had asked you to pray for him (were you living in his day!), what do you think he would have requested that you pray? _____

3. What does Paul reflect as his primary concern in Philippians 1:12-18a?

4. How do you think being a Christian in America and where you presently live has impacted your life? ... our lives? _____

5. What do you think Jesus meant in Luke 14:26 by “If anyone comes to me and *does not hate ... even his own life*, he cannot be my disciple?” _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect on the selflessness of the apostle Paul as reflected in this passage, and then reflect on our orientation with respect to ourselves. Are we more “consumer driven” – what’s in it for me? Then pray about that. Personally, I think we often have a major problem with that mentality.

Read Philippians 1:18 and Ephesians 3:1-21.

1. In light of Phil 1:18, what ought to be our attitude towards other evangelicals who preach Christ, but don't share our Reformed Theology in some of its distinctives? _____

2. What is the stewardship and gift of grace given to Paul according to Ephesians 3:1-10? _____

Keep in mind that Paul wrote Ephesians during the same imprisonment as he wrote Philippians.

3. How do Philippians 1:12-18a and Ephesians 3:1-13 and 6:18-20 relate to one another, both with respect to Paul's concern over the congregation's reaction to his imprisonment, and in terms of Paul's primary concern with respect to the gospel? _____

4. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21 is one of the great prayers of the Scripture, and especially of the New Testament. What is its primary focus, and how does that relate to Philippians 1:18a? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: May I suggest that you make Ephesians 3:14-21 a prayer you use to guide your own prayers for the congregation at WPC (or wherever you may be a member), and especially that you use it as a model to pray for your pastor – Pastors Chad and Knox and their families for WPC members. If they are to preach Christ to you (Phil 1:18), and set forth the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8), nothing is more important for Chad or for Knox (and for me) than that Eph 3:14-19 becomes an ever growing reality in our lives. Pray it for yourself as well. A good passage to memorize!

Read Philippians 1:18b-26.

Nowhere in his letters are Paul’s primary and controlling principles of life better set forth than here and 3:7ff, and in them we find what ought to be the controlling principles of our own lives. And although I said “principles,” they actually boil down to one: “For to me to live is Christ!” And even though we looked at that in last month’s Bible Reading Plan, we’ll look at it again on the 12th of this month, because it is so critical.

1. But Phil 1:20 powerfully expresses one application of “For to me to live is Christ.” What do you think Paul would consider his “shame”? _____

When we affirm in the WPC Vision Statement that we exist to develop in ourselves and others a passion for . . . the preeminence of Christ in all of life and in all the world, just like “a passion for the glory of God,” it has three aspects:

- a passion to know him as the glorious person he is
- a passion to glorify or honor him in the way we live in all of life, and
- a passion to declare his glory to the nations

You can see the first of those in **Philippians 3:7-11 – read those verses**

You can see the second of those in the present passage, especially vs 20, and

You can see the third in Paul’s concern that Christ be preached wherever he is and can go (chap 4:10-20 speaks of his partnership with the Philippian church in carrying the gospel on further in his missionary journeys.

2. From this passage, if Paul is spared death – which he will be in this particular imprisonment – how does he intend to honor Christ in life? _____

3. But should he be put to death – which he chooses to consider as at least a possibility – how do you think he intends to honor Christ in that case? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: It is worth our reflecting on life and death, and what it means for us to honor Christ in both. Spend some time reflecting on how you can bear fruit for Christ in life, and what you need to contemplate in order to face death – whenever it may come – in a manner that honors Christ. We should pray that each of us would come to regard our greatest shame to fail to honor Christ in life and in death. That doesn’t come easily for self-oriented people like we tend to be in this consumer driven society. It is all too easy for us to become too “me-centered,” thinking more about what Christ might do for us, and what we want him to do for us, than how we can honor him in life and in death. We ought to consider well what he has done and does for us, but let that motivate us to consider what we might do for him to bring honor to his name. Pray about that.

Read Philippians 1:18b-26 again, this time noticing not what Paul intends to do, and desires to do, but how he expects that he will in fact be able to do it.

During the last portion of my preaching ministry at WPC, I had us referencing the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and Larger Catechism (WLC), with the intent of helping us see the rich resource we have in those documents, and to learn to use them to help us grow in our understanding of God’s Word and what it teaches. Once again I want to draw your attention to these documents to understand better Paul’s allusion to “the help of the Spirit of Christ” in Phil 1:19. *So, let’s read from WCF 13 and 16.3:*

WCF 13.1 They, who are once effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, **by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them;** the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

WCF 13.2 This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abides still some remnants of corruption in every part: whence arises a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

WCF 13.3 In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail, yet, **through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ,** the regenerate part does overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

WCF 16.3 **Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ.** And that they may be enabled thereunto, beside the graces they have already received, **there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit to work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure:** yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty unless upon a special motion of the Spirit; but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

These are well-balanced statements of what the Scripture teaches. Paul alludes to his need of “the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,” to enable him to honor Christ, whether by life or death.

1. *Read Luke 11:5-13.* How does that relate to Philippians 1:19? _____

One would think that if anyone might depend wholly upon his own prayers, it would be the apostle Paul. But Paul requests prayer a number of times from churches to which he writes.

Read the following passages and make some notes regarding what Paul requests that various churches pray on his behalf. I will give you room on the following page.

1. Read Romans 15:30-33 _____

2. Ephesians 6:18-20 _____

3. Colossians 4:2-4 _____

4. 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 _____

5. Philemon 22 _____

1 Thessalonians 5:25 just makes the simple request: “Brothers, pray for us.” It occurred to me as I looked back through Paul’s letters, that the books where he makes no such request for prayer from the church, are churches where he has had to address considerable problems, where there is some urgency – as in Galatians – personal strains with the church – as in 1 & 2 Corinthians – or the personal letters to Timothy and Titus. In each of the others he requests prayer.

For your Meditation and Prayer: In Acts 4:23-33, Peter and John had just been released from custody by the Jewish authorities, and they come to the church and report what had happened. The church then enters into prayer (4:24-30), praying specifically for courage to continue to speak God’s word with all boldness in spite of threats from the Jewish leaders, and for power for the apostles to heal and do signs and wonders in the name of Jesus for the progress of the gospel. The result of their prayer is that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to continue to speak the word of God with boldness. Notice how prayer and the ministry of the Spirit are related. Returning to Philippians 1:19, one can see the same, and that Paul is making clear that he values their prayers, expecting that the result will be help from the Spirit of Jesus Christ that will enable him to honor Christ in life or in death. The word translated “deliverance” in 1:19 is actually the word “salvation,” and likely is not referring to the certainty of release from prison, but of his being empowered by the Spirit to honor Christ, whether in life or death, and ultimately to be vindicated by God in the final judgment, not unlike his comments in 2 Timothy 4:16-18, when in a subsequent imprisonment he does not expect to be spared death at the hands of the Roman emperor. All of which is to say, these things teach us to pray for our leaders and for the church itself, that we may be empowered by the Spirit to be faithful in our witness to the world, no matter what opposition we may face. We cannot stand, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. So pray!

Read Philippians 1:18b-26 again.

WLC 154 says: *What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation? A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.*

Pastor Chad has made it clear that he believes we need to emphasize the “ordinary means of grace” mentioned in this question – and we could include “fellowship with other believers” (as in Acts 2:42ff). Many today have turned to all sorts of means to try to make the church thrive, and sometimes have de-emphasized the importance of preaching the word of God, praying, and celebrating the sacraments.

Today, I want you to do something a little different: to devote your entire time to praying through Phil 1:18b-27. **Notice that I have gone one verse beyond what I asked you to read above, because this is what I want you to do:**

1. Pray for pastors Chad and Knox, for Melissa as she works with Knox, for your elders and deacons, etc., that by the Spirit they may be filled with a passion to live faithfully to the honor of Christ (1:20), and that Jesus may be preeminent in their lives.

2. Pray that they may be able to minister to the congregation “for your progress and joy in the faith” (1:25).

3. And then I want you to think about whether you have something of a negative attitude towards any other person(s) in the congregation, and to pray for four things especially:

a. That the Lord will work in them by his Spirit to give them a passion for the glory of God and the preeminence of Christ in all of their life as mentioned back on pgs 1 & 9 (look back to those to see what “a passion for the glory of God” and “a passion for the preeminence of Christ” have in view).

b. If you harbor something against another, confess your sin to the Lord, and reflect on all that the Lord might harbor against you, were he to treat you as your sins before him deserve, and ask for grace to pray for that person, or persons, and,

c. that unless that person is not a believer at all – in which case you should pray for their salvation – that you pray based on Phil 1:27, that God would enable you and that person both to live “worthy of the gospel of Christ ... standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”

d. Lastly, that if you know of others in the congregation who have bad attitudes towards the pastors, the elders or deacons, or towards others in the congregation, that you pray these same things for them, that God would deliver them from their sinful spirit, and enable them to obey 1:27 too.

The above are your guidelines for *Meditation and Prayer* for this day.

Read Philippians 1:18b-26 again. Our focus today, somewhat akin to one day last month, will be on 1:21a – “For to me to live is Christ.”

I said last month, and have said a number of times at WPC over the years, that I believe this simple statement – 5 words in the Greek – is the most comprehensive and profound statement ever made about the Christian life. If you have last month’s Bible Reading Plan, you might look back to August 7 & 8 to see why. Although today will overlap the 7th, let’s look at this particular statement in Philippians alone. My point, however, as I illustrated in the August 8th reading, is that Ephesians makes clear that everything relates to Christ by the Father’s appointment (Ephesians 1:3).

1. In the immediate context, the statement relates to Paul’s “eager expectation and hope,” which is _____

2. It also relates to why Paul can say that “to die is gain,” namely, that his desire is to “_____”, for that is far better.” (1:23)

3. Why was Paul willing to relinquish his boast in his pedigree and his accomplishments as a young man, and a Pharisee? (3:7ff) _____

4. In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul describes the “mind of Christ” as seen in his laying aside of his glory as the Son of God, in order to go to the Cross. What conclusions do you think Paul drew from those events? I’ll offer a few hints:

a. Galatians 2:20 _____

b. Philippians 2:3-5 If Christ did what 2:6-8 says, then we should _____

c. Philippians 2:9-13 What is the significance of Christ being proclaimed “Lord” for how we live? _____

5. The source of Paul’s joy is _____ (3:1: 4:4)

6. Paul’s dependence for every need he has or shall have is in _____ (4:19)

7. When he comes to stand before the Lord, he will do so resting upon whose righteousness? _____ (3:9)

For your Meditation and Prayer: If you have the August Bible Reading Plan, let me suggest that you turn to August 8, and focus on that for your prayer time. It goes into far more detail about what Paul means by “For me to live is CHRIST!”

Read 1:18b-26 again. You may consider it tedious to read the same passage over and over, but my hope is that by the time we move on, it will be very familiar to you, more than if we just read once and passed on to the next passage.

Paul completes his sentence “For me to live is Christ,” with a tremendous affirmation: “and to die is gain!”

1. Why is that so? _____

Read the following from WLC 86: *WLC 86 What is the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death? A. The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, till the resurrection and judgment of the great day.*

It has always troubled me to listen to people – whether church members or not, but usually not – speak of a deceased loved one, who reflected no love for Christ, as though that person is now in a better place. The question/answer above brings together the Biblical teaching about what happens to a person at death. Paul is not dealing with unbelievers in today’s reading, but with his own certainty in light of the gospel. But elsewhere he does, and no one was more graphic in his description of the final state of those who do not believe than Jesus. So, the issue of whether a person is a genuine believer who loves the Lord is absolutely critical.

2. What do you look forward to most about heaven? _____

3. What did Paul look forward to most, and how does that compare with your answer? _____

There are actually a number of things to look forward to, not least is that our souls (and at the coming of Christ, our bodies) will be made perfect in holiness. We will be free from the battle with sin, which will not mean that we simply don’t do or think bad things anymore. It means positively that we will love the Lord – Father, Son, and Spirit, the one triune God – with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our brothers and sisters as Christ has loved us. It is also important to keep in mind that here Paul is speaking of an intermediate state, not our final

state. Not until the coming of Christ will we enter upon the final state of redemption, for that is the time of the redemption of the body, when those who have died, and whose spirits have been with Christ in heaven, will receive resurrection bodies, and those still alive will experience a transformation in their bodies, all conditioned to live eternally in a new heaven and new earth. Paul alludes to that in Romans 8:18-25, Peter in 2 Peter 3:13, and John more fully in Revelation 21-22.

For your Meditation and Prayer: Spend a few minutes thinking about what the world might have been like as it developed, had Adam and Eve not fallen. I think that is the way we get some idea of what life will be like in the new heaven and new earth. But there will be a distinct difference, a very rich difference, something God particularly wanted accomplished by the fall of Adam and Eve: we will have a huge concept of the glory of God's grace, and the wonder of his love for us as sinners! Close your time reflecting on Ephesians 2:7, one of the most amazing verses in all of Scripture (in my opinion). It will give you reason to praise and thank God, and reason to bow in humble confession of our failure to understand the greatness of his love, and to be motivated by that to live with a passion to please the one who has loved us, and will love us, beyond our imagination.

Read Philippians 1:18b-26 again, this time with the question in your mind: “How does the selflessness of Paul evidence itself in this passage?”

Remember: Paul is in prison, and it appears that he contemplates two alternatives, namely, that he would be released, or that he might be put to death. He seems to indicate that he expects to be released, but still, it is not a certainty.

1. Does he have a preference, and why? _____

2. What would your preference be, and why? _____

3. Why then – if he could choose which – is he *undecided* as to which he would choose? _____

4. In light of Paul’s history of ministry, what would it mean for Paul to choose to live IF the choice were in his hands, which it is not? _____

I’ve heard people say they would like to live on to see their children grow up, or more likely for most, their grandchildren. I understand that. But what if living on meant persecution, beatings, likely imprisonments – and keep in mind that prisons of that day were not as nice as ours, to say the least(!)? Again, why would Paul be torn between the two destinies IF he had a choice?

For your Meditation and Prayer: In chapter 2, vs 5-8, Paul will speak of Jesus, who though in the form of God – meaning that he *was* God – nevertheless, humbled himself and took the form of a servant that he might lay down his life for us on the Cross. Jesus knew what taking to himself a human nature would mean for him. Yet he did it anyway. He put others’ interests ahead of his own, and willingly took to himself a human nature that he might suffer and die on our behalf. Do you see a parallel between what Jesus did, and what Paul would be doing if he had the option to live on, which likely would have led to further persecution, and likely to death at the hands of the Roman officials? When I say Paul had a passion for the preeminence of Christ in all of life and in all the world, it means that Paul put the interests of Christ ahead of his own interests. Here are two incredible models of selflessness. Both chose a path that was to their decided disadvantage in many ways, but to our advantage. Christ’s was definitely the toughest road, but Paul entered into the sufferings of Christ in many ways. It is good for us to pray for wisdom and insight into our own selfishness and self-orientation, asking the Lord to help us overcome that and devote ourselves to the honor of Christ above all.

Read Philippians 1:27-30.

Today we are going to look at, and think about, the word “worthy” found in verse 27. The particular form of the word in Phil 1:27 is an adverb, describing the verb “live.” We are going to look at several uses of the adverb and the adjective. Between the two, the adverb and adjective, there are about 47 occurrences in the New Testament. We can’t look at all of those today, so I’ve simply chosen a few. Let’s just read through them quickly, and then ask a few questions about the word “worthy.” I have the translation of that word in bold.

Matt. 3:8 Therefore bear fruit **in keeping with** repentance;

Matt. 10:37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not **worthy** of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not **worthy** of Me.

Matt. 10:38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not **worthy** of Me.

Lk. 10:7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is **worthy** of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.

John. 1:27 “*It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not **worthy** to untie.” (John the Baptist’s statement about Jesus)

Rom. 16:2 ...that you receive her [our sister Phoebe] in the Lord in a manner **worthy** of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

Eph. 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner **worthy** of the calling with which you have been called,

Phil. 1:27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner **worthy** of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel

Col. 1:10 so that you will walk in a manner **worthy** of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

1 Thess. 2:12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner **worthy** of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Rev. 4:11 “**Worthy** are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

Rev. 5: 11-12 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “**Worthy** is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

1. When we speak of the “worth” of something, what are we talking about?

2. If we describe something as “worthless,” what does that mean? _____

The word “worthy” indicates there ought to be a correspondence between something and the “value” of whatever we are talking about. Look at Luke 10:7 on the previous page. Can you see that principle there? A person is to be paid for the value of his labor. So, how much do you value the faithful ministry of the gospel?

3. Note Matthew 3:8 on the previous page. If someone says they have repented of something they have done wrongly, but there is no fruit of change, how much would you value their claim? _____

John the Baptist was rebuking the Pharisees and Sadducees for coming out to him as though they appreciated his ministry, when in fact there was no fruit in their lives to indicate they placed any significant value on what the repentance he proclaimed called upon them to do.

4. Look through the list and fill in the blanks below from the verses on p 17:

Matt 3:8 fruit worthy of _____

Matt 10:37f “... is not worthy of _____”

Luke 10:7 “the laborer is worthy of _____”

John 1:27 John the Baptist says of Jesus “I am not worthy to _____

Rom 16:2 “worthy of _____”

Eph 4:1 “worthy of the _____ ...”

Phil 1:27 “worthy of the _____ of Christ”

Col 1:10 “in a manner worthy of _____”

1 Thes 2:12 “walk in a manner worthy of _____”

Revelation 4:11 “Worthy are _____, _____, _____, _____”

Rev 5:11 “Worthy is the _____...”

For your Meditation and Prayer: As you look back at Philippians 1:27-30, and what Paul is calling us to do, the question is this: how much do you value the Gospel? It is about Christ, about God’s redemptive plan. The Gospel is the Good News about all that God had done for sinners in Christ. So how much value do you place on that? Think about that. How much force is behind Paul’s exhortation in 1:27f? What could he have said to emphasize it more strongly? In light of your answers, pray about what Paul says we are to do in these verses, and evaluate how seriously you pursue these matters in your own life.

Read Philippians 1:27-30, and then Ephesians 2:11-22 and 4:1-16.

Ephesians is a tremendous portrayal of God’s redemptive purpose in the world. After a comprehensive/panoramic view of that purpose in 1:3-14, and of its application to each individual whom God has chosen to redeem in 2:1-10, Paul, writing to a primarily Gentile church, addresses them in 2:11-22, and makes clear God’s purpose to gather from the nations a people whom he will make his own, along with those of Israel whom he brings to Christ, and “create in himself [Christ] one new man in place of the two” [i.e., Israelite and Gentile]. “One new man” is clearly a corporate term, and is basically “one new redeemed humanity” in the midst of a fallen mass of humanity. And God’s purpose is to transform the members of this “new redeemed humanity” into the likeness of his Son. Ephesians, perhaps more than any other of the epistles sets forth systematically what it means for Christ to be preeminent in all areas of life. But it begins in the church, in each local church.

Chapters 4-6 of Ephesians seem to contain an overview of the Christian Life, and significantly begin with the church. Paul calls upon them to live “worthy” of the calling to which they have been called, which I would contend is their calling to be a part of that “one new redeemed humanity” spoken of in Ephesians 2:15.

1. What is the emphasis of 2:11-22, and how does that relate to 4:1-16? _____

2. If you are not a part of that “one new redeemed humanity,” what will be your eternal destiny? _____

(cf. Ephesians 2:1-3)

3. If you are a part of that “one new redeemed humanity,” what are you told about God’s purpose for you in Ephesians 2:7? _____

4. What value would you place upon that destiny, especially over against that of question # 2 above? _____

5. So, how strong is Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 4:1? And does your concern to pursue the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by exercising humility and gentleness with patience (long-suffering), and bearing with others in love, reflect appropriately the “value” of the calling to be part of that one new redeemed humanity of which Paul speaks? _____

6. Are there actions you need to take to restore unity with another person? Do you cling to ill feelings, or bitterness and resentment towards another, feelings that may have moderated over time, perhaps through avoidance of that person, but which would immediately flare up given another similar interaction as in the past? In other words, time has merely buried the matter deeply enough to not be as sensitive an issue, but it remains like a landmine that has been buried beneath the sand or dirt, but will explode if stepped on again. _____

Remember, there is “peace-breaking,” “peace-faking,” and “peacemaking.”

For your Meditation and Prayer: Jesus said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). Why do you think they would be called “sons of God,” and how does that relate to the Scriptures we have read from Ephesians today? Think about those things, and pray about them. How poor a testimony churches have often been to the world regarding what a new redeemed humanity ought to look like! We need to pray more about that than many of us do! Make that a matter of prayer today – for yourself, searching your own heart, and for others as well.

Read Philippians 1:27-30, and then turn to Matthew and read 12:22-30 and 13:18-30.

Philippians 1:27-28 speaks of *standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,* ²⁸ *and not frightened in anything by your opponents.* One Greek lexicon defines the word for *striving together as to toil together with someone in a struggle, implying opposition and/or competition.*

1. How might that relate to what you read in Matthew 12 & 13? _____

In Ephesians 6:10ff Paul describes a spiritual warfare. That is what he is referring to in Philippians 1:27ff.

2. Who are the combatants in Matthew 12:22-30? _____

Did you notice the mention of the binding of the “strong man” in order to plunder his house? That is what Jesus did by his death and resurrection, and it is what he is about now through his Church – he is plundering Satan’s kingdom, redeeming a people from among all nations and gathering them to be one new redeemed humanity, that will one day live in the new heaven and earth.

3. How might Matthew 12:30 relate to Matthew 13:18-30? _____

4. Jesus stated a principle in Matthew 12:25. How does that relate and apply to Philippians 1:27-30? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: When Paul gave his instructions in Ephesians 6:10-20, he closed with an appeal for prayer, and urging the believers to pray for one another and for him as well. Let’s heed that exhortation now . . .

Read Philippians 1:27-30 again, then Luke 21:10-19 and 2 Timothy 4:6-18.

Our focus today is on Paul’s statement in Phil 1:28 “not frightened in anything by your opponents.” He certainly modeled that well for us, because he had opponents virtually everywhere he went!

Luke 21:10-19 is talking about the time before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., I believe, but the principles are valid far beyond that.

1. As you read that passage, did you see reason to be afraid? Does it not seem odd that Jesus would indicate they should not be afraid (see 21:9)? How *can* they not be afraid? _____

2. What is the purpose of their going through the times he describes here in Luke 21:12-17? _____

3. Why is the “world” often so hostile toward Christians? _____

4. How does Paul’s experience in the time he wrote Philippians, and afterwards in a subsequent imprisonment that would lead to his death, illustrate what Jesus said in Luke 21? _____

5. Compare Luke 21:16-19 and 2 Timothy 4:17-18. What similarities do you see? What insight can you gain regarding what it means for us to be protected by the Lord. _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12 to Jesus. It was a great promise of God’s care, and yet Jesus was crucified. How are we to understand the promises of protection in light of what happened to the apostles, to Paul, and to Jesus himself? Give thought to how you would feel about persecution, or even about someone being offended at you for standing for your faith. Why are we so soft, and unprepared for any suffering for the gospel? Why are we surprised when the Scriptures tell us clearly that these things will happen?

Read Philippians 1:27-30 again, this time with an eye for who and why some people ought to be afraid, but often aren't.

1. Who ought to be afraid according to this passage? _____

This passage does not give the whole picture of who ought to be afraid, however.

Read Romans 3:9-20, and then 3:23 and 6:23.

2. So, who has reason to fear according to these passages? _____

Read John 3:16-18 and 3:36 and then Romans 10:9-15.

3. What do these passages suggest about people, even those who have not been taught the gospel? _____

Finally, read 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10.

Does this passage suggest that some ought to fear, in fact, that some ought to be terrified? Explain: _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: These are only a few of many passages that portray something of the final judgment. There are some who try to appeal to general statements to suggest that all will be saved in the end, or perhaps all but the most wicked. But there is NO warrant for such teaching, and what there is, is terrifying. Hebrews 10:30-31 states: "For we know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay.'" And Again, "The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We should not take these sorts of texts lightly. It is critical that we clearly understand the Gospel and the demands Christ lays upon those who would follow him. He did not mince words. Indeed, the most fearful portrayals of those who will be lost are set forth by Jesus himself, who spoke of outer darkness, of weeping and gnashing of teeth, and of eternal or unquenchable or hell of fire. There is something to fear and from which to flee, and it ought to increase our sense of the wonder of grace and of the gospel of grace, and our horror of what Jesus faced on the Cross on our behalf. Pray with all of that in view.

Read Philippians 1:27-30 once again, and take note of verses 29-30 especially.

Does not vs 29 strike you as an odd way to look at suffering? The word for “granted” to you, is the word “graciously” or “freely given,” and occurs in texts like Romans 8:32 and Ephesians 4:32 (twice).

1. What does it mean that we are “graciously” or “freely given” “to believe in him” [Christ]? Hint: Ephesians 2:9, Acts 13:48, and/or John 6:37-45. _____

2. But oddly, it also says it has been graciously or freely given to us that for the sake of Christ we should ... suffer for his sake. Why? _____

3. **Read Matthew 5:10-12, Acts 9:10-19, and 2 Corinthians 11:21-33, and jot down any insights you gain about Philippians 1:29-30. Give it some thought.**

4. Finally, read Acts 5:41, which, although it refers to persecution, may well be applicable to other forms of suffering. But what does it mean about suffering?

For your Meditation and Prayer: The reasons for suffering are many, more than we can possibly refer to or mention. Job is another example. Sometimes it may be to prepare us to minister to others, sometimes years later than suffering we may have experienced. Sometimes it may be to keep us from being satisfied with all that God has given us in this most prosperous country, but without God – we could easily do that, you know! Israel fell prey to that very thing after they entered Canaan, in spite of God’s warnings in Deuteronomy 6 & 8. But God hasn’t lost control, and he still has good purposes that we may or may not ever see in this life. But “for the sake of Christ,” ought to urge us to honor him in suffering.

Read Philippians 2:1-4.

It is good for us to keep in mind the context of 1:27-30, and particularly vs 27, and also to remember what we dealt with on September 17, which you might glance back at briefly.

I think this passage, and that to follow in vss 5-11, bring out the importance of *motive* . Motive is important for several reasons. It often makes the difference between what is good and to be commended, and what is evil and sometimes despicable. The same act can be good or bad, or often somewhat of a mixture, all depending on motive. IF a person could live in absolute conformity to the last 6 Commandments, for example, that would not make that person a good person and worthy of heaven. It is important to realize that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and that even things that “for the matter of them ... may be things which God commands” (WCF 16.7) may be sinful if not done from the right motive. It is NOT alright to live indifferent to God!!! The greatest sin is not murder, or adultery, or theft, etc., although each is evil. The greatest sin is not obeying the greatest commandment, which is failing to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul. He is fully worthy of such love, and we need to face the reality that our dishonor of God is our greatest sin, and all other sins flow from that sin.

Paul often deals with our motives, not least with the greatest of all motives, the motive of loving and honoring God, two things which are intimately intertwined, if not virtually the same thing. So, when Paul begins this section, his focus is first of all upon motive, particularly with the purpose of “motivating” us to action.

I realize that Phil 2:1 has been interpreted in various ways, but for my part, I think the focus is certainly upon Christ and his love and work on our behalf, and upon the Father’s purposes for us in and through Christ ministered to us by the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of believers. Whether the affection and sympathy or compassion are God’s, or Paul’s appeal to their feelings toward him in light of his ministry of the gospel to them, I’m not sure. But in either case, there is strong motivation to pursue what Paul describes in vss 2-4.

1. Does your profession to love Christ stir you to do what vss 2-4 say? What is the evidence that it does? _____

2. What do you do to nurture motivation rooted in the love of God the Father and of Christ the Son that can and will enable you to overcome the tendencies we have to violate or just ignore the pursuit of “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” with other believers in the church? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Thomas Chalmers was a Scottish Presbyterian pastor and theologian who preached a sermon entitled “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.” What I want to suggest that you do today is take some time to reflect on whether or not you have experienced “the expulsive power of a new affection” in this manner: Has the love of Christ *for you* kindled a love of Christ *in you* of sufficient expulsive power to motivate you to deal with sin as God defines sin in his word? As one aspect of that, does it motivate you to want to pursue the sort of life in the church described in Philippians 2:3-4?

We sometimes get irritated at others in the church and develop an attitude towards them that we feel is fully justified, while at the same time we would be horrified to think that God would do that toward us! What hope would there be of relationship with God if he held our sins against us and treated us even a tiny bit like we deserve? There are legitimate reasons to break fellowship with others, but they are rare compared to the number of times that Christians take offense at others and withdraw their affections, even if they cover it up by simply ignoring or remaining distant from that person or those persons.

I fall prey to this too from time to time, and I want to invite you to reflect on the above and make it a matter of prayer.

Read Philippians 2:1-4, and then John 13:34-35.

In verse 1 Paul had suggested four motivations to urge the Philippian believers to fulfill his joy by “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (2:2). Today we are going to just look at “love.”

1. What is “new” about the commandment in John 13:34-35? _____

2. When the disciples were traveling with Jesus to Jerusalem, even though Jesus was telling them what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem, at least twice they got into discussions about who was the greatest, or should have seats of honor or privilege in the kingdom. How did Jesus answer them? (see Mark 9:30-37 and 10:35-45) _____

Just before John 13:34-35, which we just read, we read that on the night of Jesus’ arrest, he laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel and basin of water, he proceeded to wash the feet of his disciples. That action portrayed two things: 1) what he would do for his disciples by dying on the Cross the very next day for the cleansing of their sin, and 2) an example of how he had loved them, (see 13:1, 12-17), and how they were to love one another.

3. So, what was the nature of that love that he showed them? _____

4. If we love one another in the church as he loved us, what ought that to look like? Describe what you think it would look like in your own words: _____

5. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a. If you are reading the ESV, the word *resentful* in verse 5 is translated “*it keeps no record of wrongs,*” in the New International Version, which is similar to the ESV footnote: “Greek ... *does not count up wrongdoing.*” Just reflect on what it would have meant if Jesus had kept a record of our wrongs against him, and acted on that basis. Would he have gone to the Cross?

For your Meditation and Prayer: Compare Jesus’ example and what Paul describes in Philippians 2:1-8, part of which awaits next month’s BRP, but which warrants your reading again now. Thanksgiving and praise are in order!

Read Philippians 2:1-4, and glance back to 1:14-18 and read that again.

Our focus today is on the word translated “selfish ambition.” We dealt with that same word on September 5, and there I spoke of it as “raw ambition.” Here it is much more subtle. I don’t consider myself guilty of “raw ambition,” but what we find here is something I imagine all of us struggle with, often unconsciously. “Selfish ambition” obviously has to do with our motives. As in Phil 1:17, the right thing can be done, but be sinful because of a wrong motive.

We dealt with vss 2-4 in the Bible Reading Plan for August 11-12. This was my description there of verses 3-4 in particular, where we find the mention of “selfish ambition:

The structure is an ABB²A² pattern, meaning that the 1st and 4th parts go together, and the 2nd and 3rd go together. In this case, (1—A¹) “selfish ambition” is defined by its contrast in (4—A²) “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (2—B¹) “conceit” is defined by its contrast in (3—B²) “but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” When seen in that light, those terms are not so blatant as they might appear. If we get into an argument with our wives or another church member, our interest and the importance of our view seems “right” to us, and we often argue for it, or become resentful if we give in and flee the conflict. That can be applied in a lot of ways, where our views and desires and perspectives seem more important [or right to us] than those of others who disagree or want to do things differently, or many other things.

As a practical matter, this is the basis for what Ken Sande had called the PAUSE Principle, a way to work though some sorts of disagreements or perspectives. (see the **Appendix with a sample of the PAUSE Principle**)

1. Do you usually think that what you think is right is right? Yes or No? Circle your choice.
2. Is what you think always right? Yes or No? Circle your choice.
3. Do you ever benefit from the perspectives of others? Yes or No? Circle your choice.
4. Do you sometimes give in to the other person’s perspective or desire simply to avoid conflict? Yes or No? Circle your choice.
5. Do you ever argue with a view to winning the case for your view or perspective or desire? Yes or No? Circle your choice.
6. Do you ever choose to compromise? Yes or No. Circle your choice.
7. If you DO compromise, why do you usually do so? _____

8. If you feel good about having compromised, why do you usually feel good about having done so? _____

I have no way to know how you answered those questions, but let me suggest a possible way of having answered them, and then relate it to our passage. I admit that this is somewhat arbitrary perhaps, but let me make a stab at it.

If you have turned here before you filled out the first page for this reading, turn back and finish it before you read or look at this page, please.

Possible answers to the questions on the previous page:

- # 1. You ought to have answered “yes.” You don’t usually think, that what you think is right, is actually wrong, do you? We may be wrong, but we usually think we are right to begin with, or we wouldn’t offer an opinion at all.
- # 2. I hope you answered “No,” because I can’t imagine you, or anybody else, always being right. We are all wrong at times.
- # 3. I hope you answered “Yes,” because if you didn’t, you probably don’t listen to anybody else’s view, and that is usually a sign of pure arrogance.
- # 4. I would imagine most would say “Yes,” but it is possible some might defend their view or perspective until the other person gives in. The latter is a rather selfish and arrogant position, while the former is a “flight” tactic, that virtually abandons responsibility for constructive input in many cases.
- # 5. See # 4.
- # 6. Most would likely say “yes,” but the problem with “compromise is that it often remains self-oriented, rather than truly taking into account the interests of others. It is satisfied if it can get what it wants, at least in large part, even if it does not serve the other person well. So, it remains basically an adversarial manner of working through an issue.
- # 7. # 6 has primarily answered this question. We compromise to salvage what WE want most often, not because of our concern for the wants of the other.
- # 8. This question simply exposes what so often happens in compromise. We feel good because we got what WE wanted. Whether the other feels good about the compromise can be an extra perk, but is not a primary consideration.

My point in all of this is that Paul’s exhortation to “Do nothing from selfish ambition” addresses all of us, not just people determined to do anything to get ahead in business or in some sector of the world or society. It affects us in marriages, in the church, in committees, in the Session and Diaconate, in business meetings, etc. And one tool – not because it is specifically taught in Scripture, but because a good application of a Scriptural principle – is the PAUSE principle. The idea of the PAUSE Principle can be useful in various disagreements even when not used formally. It can point the direction we need to follow in working through a myriad of differences in a manner that yields creative solutions that address the interests of different parties, and supremely the interest of Christ, to fulfil Paul’s exhortation to “look not only to [one’s] own interests, but also to the interests of others.” That avoids “selfish ambition,” the desire to satisfy only one’s own interests, and brings people together as a team looking for a creative solution together.

For your Meditation and Prayer: The principle Paul states can be worked out in various ways, but let me suggest that you turn to the Appendix and spend some time today and in days ahead studying the PAUSE principle to see how it works, and to learn to use something like this in working with other people.

Read Philippians 2:1-4 again.

In verse 3 Paul uses a second term with “selfish ambition,” translated “conceit” in the ESV, “vain conceit” in the New International Version, “empty conceit” in the New American Standard Version. It translates a Greek word composed of two words, one meaning *empty* or *vain*, and the other meaning *glory*.

Read John 5:41 & 44 and Romans 2:6-11.

1. We come back to *motivation* again. Is it wrong to seek *glory*? _____

The opposite of “conceit” (“vain glory” or “empty glory”) in Philippians 2:3 is “but in *humility* count others more significant than yourselves.” The word Paul uses for *humility* here is also made up of two words, one essentially meaning *humility*, and the other *to think* or have a *particular attitude toward*. The latter word is used in vs 5 and translated “have this *attitude* in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (NASV), and the verbal form of the other word – *humble* – describes the attitude of Jesus in verse 8. We’ll return to that in October when we pick up vss 5-8, which Chad is scheduled to preach on September 30.

We sometimes think we ought to be *humble* because we are sinners, and that is true so far as it goes. But Phil 2:5 & 8 makes clear that Jesus reflected *humility* when he laid aside his glory as the eternal Son of God to become a man and to go to the Cross. Jesus used the word for *humble* of himself in Matthew 11:28-30, where the ESV translates it as *lowly* – “I am gentle (meek) and lowly (humble) in heart...”

2. So, if Jesus was humble, and yet without sin, what is the main idea of “humility” as over against “vain” or “empty” glory? _____

Read Luke 18:9-14, and particularly note vss 9 & 14b.

3. What was the attitude of the Pharisee towards others? _____

... towards himself? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Remember that Paul is concerned about unity from Philippians 1:27 through our passage. Read Ephesians 4:1-3 and Colossians 3:12-15, both of which contain the word *humble* in similar contexts. Why do you think *humility* is so important? Reflect on the fact that *humility* is not simply thinking poorly of one’s self because of sin (although awareness of our sinfulness may lead to true humility). Remember, Jesus was humble and without sin. Humility is not so much thinking badly of one’s self, it’s not thinking of one’s self but of others, counting others more significant than one’s self, or before one’s self. It is other-oriented. Let’s pray for that sort of selflessness and concern for others.

Read Philippians 2:1-4, and today let's focus on vs 4.

Again, remember the context: in 1:27 Paul made it clear that it was critical that “you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” That is our calling, and is why I emphasized peacemaking so much in the latter years of my ministry at WPC. Besides here in Philippians, the same emphasis was seen yesterday in Ephesians 4:1-3 (actually 4:1-16), and Colossians 3:12-15. Another such passage is James 3:13-18, in contrast to James 4:1ff.

Read James 3:13-18. This is a passage we read about every year in the Session to focus on how we needed to interact with one another. There is a tremendous emphasis on peace and how it is achieved. You will notice the word for “selfish ambition” in vs 14, and in contrast vs 13 mentions the “meekness of wisdom,” and vs 17-18 further develop the opposite attitude of the “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition” mentioned in vs 14, both of which are self-focused.

One word in vs 17 is translated “open to reason.” In another translation it is “ready to be convinced.” It is eager to *listen* to others and *their* “interests” and *perspectives*.

I want us to return today to the PAUSE Principle in the Appendix at the end, and let me walk you through it. This is not an exposition of the Word, but an application of what we find in Philippians 2:3-4 and James 3:13-18. And it is a useful *tool*. So, looking at it, let's walk through the acrostic PAUSE. An “acrostic” is a series of words in which the first letter of each word spells out another, in this case PAUSE. You can see what it stands for at the top of the first page: **P**repare, **A**ffirm relationships, **U**nderstand interests, **S**earch for a creative solution, and **E**valuate objectively and reasonably.

Let me try to illustrate the use of the PAUSE Principle by a *make-believe* or *fictional* rendition of Acts 6:1ff regarding the neglect of the care of some of the widows of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. A conflict developed when the Greek-speaking Jewish widows were neglected by *meals-on-wheels*. The Greek-speaking (Hellenistic) Jews complained against the Hebrew/Aramaic-speaking Jews that their widows were being overlooked. They came complaining to the Apostles and accusing them of not taking the problem seriously and doing nothing about it. (Remember that this is a fictional version of the story!)

The Apostles **Prepared** (the “P” in PAUSE) to meet with the parties in conflict by praying about the matter first, and gathering all the facts they could about the situation. The **Issue** was clear: the widows of one group were being overlooked. But as the Apostles looked into the matter, they realized that the neglect was not intentional. The Greek-speaking Jews were made up of Jews who had moved to the Jerusalem area from among those scattered throughout the Romans Empire, and some had little extended family with them. The Hebrew-speaking Jews had lived in Jerusalem and the area for many years, and had extensive family there. The families received and distributed much of the food to their own widows. But the Greek-speaking families did not have the extensive network of family present to help with that task. They were more dependent upon the church to distribute the food to their widows, some of whom had moved to the

area with very little, if any other family members with them – or, had been brought there to their original home and left as family went back to their place of residence somewhere in the Empire.

As the Greek-speaking Jews pressed the Apostles to do something about it, the Apostles realized they couldn't handle the distribution themselves and carry out their task of teaching the Word of God and proclaiming Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The conflict began to heat up.

So, the Apostles met with the other parties, and made clear that they could not do what the Greek-speaking Jews were asking, namely, to distribute the food to their widows. So there were clearly two **Positions**. Ill-feelings among the Greek-speaking Jews towards the Apostles was threatening the fledgling church.

Now the conflict could have been argued simply between the two positions, which were: 1) your Apostles need to be distributing the food to our widows, who are being neglected and are in great need; 2) the Apostles were saying, "We cannot do it and fulfill our ministry of preaching and teaching the Word of God.

But, instead of arguing the two positions, the Apostles sat down with the Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking Jews to explore the **Interests** of all involved. The **Interests** are like the huge portion of an Iceberg that is below the surface of the water. They asked the questions under # 3 in the diagram regarding what each party wanted to achieve and avoid, and also what Christ's Interests were – what he wanted achieved and avoided.

The result was that they realized there was a huge area of **Shared Interests** (see the ovals on its second page in the diagram). The **Different Interests** did not relate to the care of the widows. On that all agreed that they wanted the widows cared for, and that Christ wanted the widows cared for. The group.

So, taking into account each parties interests, they began to differences lay in how and who would care for them. The Apostles said: "Christ appointed us to preach and teach the gospel, and it would not be fitting for us to neglect that calling. It would have devastating effects upon the church and what it is supposed to be doing." The Greek-speaking Jews said: "There are too many widows of our folks who have not extended families, and we have to work to earn enough for our families to survive, and we can't handle all of the widows of our **Search for a creative solution**. And, as they did so, someone suggested that they needed a ministry team that could oversee the matter and recruit others to help distribute the food to the neglected widows. That satisfied the **Shared Interests**, and at the same time addressed the differences that had caused the heated conflict, and addressed the different interests of the two parties. So, the Apostles told the members of the church to select 7 men of godly character to serve as a Diaconate to oversee the proper care of the widows. The congregation chose seven men of such character, brought them to the Apostles, who ordained them, and established the first Diaconate, which became an abiding office (as seen in 1 Timothy 3).

They agreed that they would wait a couple of months, and then **Evaluate Objectively and Reasonably** whether the solution was working, and it was later found that it was.

That is the PAUSE Principle at work, and it fulfills what Paul urges in Philippians 2:2-4. So, help one another when conflicts arise, and remind one another that there is a tool to try to do what Paul has taught in Phil 2:1ff.

Read Philippians 1:27 and 2:1-2, and then turn to John 17 and read the prayer Jesus prayed just before his arrest the night before the Cross, and as you read jot down below the verses that pertain to unity among his followers.

1. _____

You ought to have found at least 4 verses. One comment: this chapter has been used by some to promote one large church organization, even though very diverse in beliefs. That is not what is in view. There is a large emphasis here on the Word of God and truth. Unity must be built upon a common commitment to the truth of God’s Word.

2. Why was it important to Jesus that his followers be “one”? What effect did he say that would have? _____

3. **Look back to John 13:34-35.** What would be the effect of members of the church loving one another as Christ has loved us? _____

4. So, if you and I fail to love one another as Christ has loved us, and fail to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:1-3), what sort of testimony does that portray to the world? What does it say to them about this new redeemed humanity that supposedly Christ is developing in the world?

5. Whose honor is at stake if we fail to maintain the peace, true peace, the peace that reflects good healthy godly relationships, not merely the absence of conflict? John 13:34-35 and John 17 are not about the absence of conflict. They are not negative statements. _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Pray that we will take most seriously the honor of Christ, that we may share Paul’s passion expressed in Philippians 1:19-21.

Read Philippians 2:5-8.

This is a tremendous passage! It is important both for *what* it teaches in itself, and also for *why* Paul teaches it. The “*why*” relates to 1:27-2:4, which 2:5 makes very evident, and we should not lose sight of that, lest we fail to see how seriously Paul takes what he has said in 1:27-2:4!

This is also a passage that has been misinterpreted and misused by some who have been declared to be heretics. Some have spoken of Jesus emptying himself of his Deity to become a man. There are some things God cannot do – you realize that don’t you? The Scripture tells us, for example, that God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). Nor could God cease to be God. The Church battled matters like this long ago, and it is important that we clearly grasp what the Scriptures say about Jesus and who he is.

Again, I would refer you to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, to chapter 8, paragraph 2 (WCF 8.2) for a statement about Jesus as the eternal Son of God and a summary of a great deal of Scripture. There you will see Phil 2:6-7 referenced, along with a number of other Scriptures: *WCF 8.2 The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.*

Read John 1:1-3 and 1:14-18, and then turn to and read John 20:24-30.

1. In light of those passages, is Jesus God or man, or both? _____

In the statement from the WCF, the language “without conversion, composition, or confusion” clarifies one person with two natures. Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, did not take to himself a human person, so there would be two separate persons involved, but took to himself a human nature, with each nature remaining intact. His Deity did not change, nor was his humanity different from ours except without sin. He was one person with two natures.

Jesus willingly accepted certain limitations in his human nature, in accord with the will of his Father, but it did not constitute a change in his divine nature. There is huge mystery here: a babe being cared for and dependent upon his mother in his human nature, upholding the universe by his power as the eternal Son of God; a child growing in wisdom and stature, and favor with God and man in his human nature, omniscient and all-knowing in his divine nature; limited to the presence of his body in one particular place in his human nature, but without limits of space in his divine nature; etc.

2. **Read Matthew 24:36.** Ought we to assume this verse undermines Jesus’

divine nature more than Luke 2:40 – “and the child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom...”? Or that the fact that Jesus became tired and slept militates against his being fully God, because God does not sleep? Explain:

I have no idea how the psychology of Jesus worked as both God and man, but I believe the testimony of Scripture, and am not quick to assume God cannot do what the Scriptures indicate he did do. The Church wrestled long and hard in its struggles with various teachings and explanations that arose (and still do), and carefully hammered out the doctrine of the Incarnation, the Trinity, Jesus being both God and man in one person, etc. It is dangerous to draw extensive conclusions from a single verse like Matthew 24:36, or as men have done with the word “emptied himself” in Phil 2:7, that contradict other passages of Scripture. I again want to encourage you to use the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* to aid you in understanding what the Scriptures teach, because these documents were hammered out by some of the most godly and knowledgeable men of their day, and in a day when those men were thoroughly committed to the authority of Scripture as the very Word of God, and further, that these have stood well the test of time spread before Church for her review and evaluation.

One final thing today: The *Westminster Larger Catechism* (which is an extremely rich document, more than I had ever realized before I led WPC through the Confession in the final series of messages I delivered, and especially prepared the Bible Reading Plan to reference the WCF and WLC) asks the question: *WLC 38 Why was it [necessary] that the Mediator should be God? A. It was [necessary] that the Mediator should be God, that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death; give worth and efficacy to his sufferings, obedience, and intercession, and to satisfy God's justice, procure his favor, purchase a peculiar people, give his Spirit to them, conquer all their enemies, and bring them to everlasting salvation.*

I placed one portion of that answer in bold to emphasize a conviction I have shared with you over the years, especially at Christmas time, that “The infinite dignity of the one who came gave infinite worthy to what he did upon and through the Cross.” To undermine the doctrine of the deity of Jesus, undermines the sufficiency of the atoning and saving work of Christ. That is a huge matter! Deviations in doctrine often carry with them unintended results. We must let God’s Word stand “as is.” There is a consistency in Truth as revealed by God and rooted in God.

For your Meditation and Prayer: Although we have become so familiar with what Philippians 2:5-8 teaches that we perhaps take it for granted and lose the wonder of it, these verses are astounding, and should draw forth our deepest appreciation and love for the one who loved us and gave himself for us.

Appendix

A Model for Handling Conflict

What IS “the PAUSE principle”?

- P** repare
- A** ffirm Relationships
- U** nderstand Interests
- S** earch for a Creative Solution
- E** valuate Objectively and Reasonably

- A.** Prepare – Pray; Get all the facts; Identify the issues; Identify the underlying desires of the heart; Seek godly counsel
- B.** Affirm Relationships—Eph 1:9-10; 2:11-22; 4:1-16, 30-5:2
- C.** Understand Interests – Phil 2:2-4 and Proverbs 20:5
“The Iceberg Effect”

Above the surface of the ocean you see two parts of a conflict:

1. The Issue – what, on the surface, is it all about?
2. The Positions taken over the Issue

Below the surface, however, are the underlying *Interests* or *Purposes* of the heart which drive and motivate the positions taken.

3. The Interests that drive and motivate the positions taken

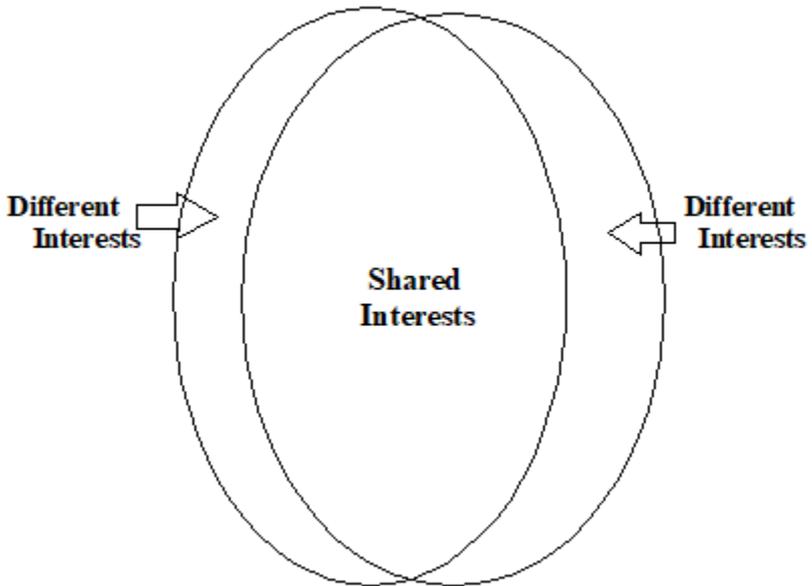
Two questions help bring out the underlying “Interests”:

- a. What do they want to achieve? ... or do they value?
- b. What do they want to avoid? ... or do they fear to lose?

There is always a question of even more importance: What are Christ’s interests?

- a. What does HE want us to achieve?
- b. What does HE want us to avoid?

ISSUE	
Your Position:	Their Position:
Your Interests:	Their Interests:
Shared Interests:	



- D. **S**earch for a Creative Solution – a solution that is not a compromise where each says: “I’m willing to give up this in order to get this much of what *I* want,” which remains still self-oriented. This is to search for a solution that fulfills the “shared interests” (provided they are in accord with Christ’s interests as taught in his Word), and at the same time addresses the concerns or interests peculiar to each. The idea is to come out with a solution that is better than either person’s own particular position, one that takes into account the concerns of both.

**A Key is understanding both
Shared Interests
and
Differences**

- E. Finally, **E**valuate Objectively and Reasonably
**How can we agree to
Objectively and Reasonably
Determine if the solution
Is working?**

