

***“Paul's Letter to the Philippians —
‘The Imitation of Paul, Our High Calling in Christ Jesus’”***

Introduction:

We have nearly finished now our overview of Paul's epistle to the believers in Philippi. Today we will provide the final “chapter”, as it were, to that high level overview of this so precious epistle. Our focus today will be on “The Imitation of Paul, Our High Calling In Christ Jesus”

Review: “A Thank You Note Never to be Forgotten - Final”

- ***The Very Language, the Words Themselves here, even very language, Compels Our Careful Study — Take Special Note (and there are 12 of them, remember) - TWELVE DIMENSIONS OF BLESSEDNESS ARE FOUND HERE.***

Last time we considered the four further dimensions found in Paul letter dimensions of our blessedness as believers today living under God's abundant grace. We left for our study today the final dimension of that blessedness, the special example the apostle is for us believers living today under the administration of God's most wonderful grace. But, as we have seen, the most pivotal of the Dimensions of Blessedness privileged to the children of God today under grace is this one:

- ***Our Singleness of Mind (The Examples of Christ & Paul) — many, many occurrences, “to think carefully” or “to mind”, used 10 times in Phil., (esp. 2:5) (1:7, 2:2 (2), 5, 3:15 (2), 16, 19, 4:2, 10)***

Phil. 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

- ***As has been made clear, this is the “capstone” teaching in this letter. The inescapable fact is that it makes all the difference “how” we are thinking. The solution to so many of life's problems is in simple terms found in how we are thinking, is it godly thinking or ungodly? Notice how that is in the center of many of the apostles statements:***

Phil. 1:30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear [to be] in me . . .

- ***This sets the stage for the whole letter and the next verses reveal:***

Phil. 2:1-3

1 . . . If [there be] therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind.

3 [Let] nothing [be done] through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

- ***This is a “conflict” of mind or struggle here bearing visible fruit, first in Paul and then, by exhortation, also in the Philippians believers or in each of us. The holy and sanctified ministry of the gospel is its primary focus here with all that accompanies that in life. The fruit of the Spirit is what this is called in Galatians chapter 5. I hope we all know it well.***

Our Outline:

- ***What is the Privilege Behind Paul’s Example? It was suffering together with Christ and also his people***
- ***What is the Preeminence of Paul’s Example? His example alone is set before us as our “type”***
- ***What is the Power Behind Paul’s Example? It is the very resurrection power of Christ Jesus manifested through Paul himself, and available for each believer:***

Our Outline Today: “The Imitation of Paul, Our High Calling in Christ Jesus”:

- ***The Three Components of This Final Teaching Here, (1) Paul’s testimony of suffering for Christ is revealed, and (2) Paul’s example is for us declared, and (3) The power behind Paul’s example is offered.***

I. What is the Privilege Behind Paul’s Example?

- ***Our Shared Sufferings & Persecutions for Christ’s Sake (1:29, 3:10 with many refs. To Paul’s “bonds” and ours as well as in 1:7, 13, 14, 16)***
 - ***Acts 9:15-16 is so relevant here:***

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

- ***With that introduction to Paul's new ministry for the Lord, we come to the key verses here in Philippians chapters 1 & 2:***

Phil. 1:29-30

29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;

30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear [to be] in me.

Phil. 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death

- ***A major theme in this letter is suffering for Christ's sake. Paul is to be our example of suffering as chapter 1 and verse 30 make so clear. Chapter 3 and verse 10 records one of the most powerful statements in all of the word of God. His example of suffering is highlighted here by his desire to fully show in his body the very dying of his Lord Jesus and his glorious resurrection. Amen.***

“...that I may know him”:

“and the power of his resurrection”:

“and the fellowship of his sufferings”:

“being made conformable unto his death”:

- ***With that powerful testimony of Paul clearly in mind, the following verses compose what is probably the most important exhortation in the entire letter and also one p***

[READ] Phil. 3:11-14

11 . . . If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but [this] one thing [I do], forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

- ***The race set before with its “mark” or “end point”, “finish line” and then the awarded “prize”: This analogy is central to this letter and others as we have seen.***
 - ***Races may be won but the rules must be adhered to or there will be a disqualification. Have you considered the Christian life this way as a race to be won? You should. We are all assured of resurrection and the glory of heaven with Christ. We are not assured of the prize referred to here. But it is available. Paul greatly desired it. Do you? Or I?***
- ***What does this all mean? This is not intended to be understood as physical at all, but is rather spiritual. Perhaps it is simply the “special” reward or prize (or crown?) that he is referring to.***
- ***The near context is so often the key to our understanding and it surely is so here. Resurrection has already been mentioned in this letter, in the previous verse 10 in fact: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death”***
- ***So, bodily resurrection is most likely not in view here but rather resurrection life of the spirit apart from the dead ones all around us is at the heart of Paul’s teaching here.***

II. What is the Preeminence of Paul’s Example? His example alone is set before us as our “type”:

- ***Introduction: Here is the heart of our teaching today. Paul’s example is preeminent today for believers living under the Grace Dispensation. Not Moses, the Christ of the Gospel accounts, not Peter and the Twelve. But Paul.***
 - ***But what does this mean? Not those others are to be our examples but Paul? How can that be? Well, it is pretty simple actually, if one has learned to rightly divide the word or truth.***

Yes indeed, those are great examples in very many ways. They are to be honored and their examples are powerful indeed. But they need to be put in their correct places. Moses was specifically given for Israel and the Law was for the Jews and not for the Gentiles. The same for the prophets. Christ was as Paul writes, “a minister of the circumcision for truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers”. His preaching was concerning the coming Kingdom to be delivered to this earth at the appointed time and miracles and signs were his calling card, as it were. See Rom. 15:8 and 15:16 for these differences between Christ in his earthly ministry and Paul. The Twelve were also for Israel (Matt. 19:28). But Paul, on the other hand, had a ministry primarily focused on the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16).

- ***Children know the power of a godly parent as a role model and mentor. They truly do and when they do not have this, or only have one parent who demonstrates the power of God through grace, there are consequences. Paul sets forth his example in so many place in his letters and makes it clear that he is distinctly our example or “type”. We really must take note of this or we will suffer the consequences:***

[READ] 1 Cor. 11:1-2

1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also [am] of Christ.
2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered [them] to you.

[READ] Phil. 3:17-19

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample ***[type]***.
18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ:
19 Whose end [is] destruction, whose God [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

[READ] Phil. 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

- ***Paul, our example, our “type”: It is not the types of the Old Testament Mosaic Law that we desperately need today. It is the Pauline “type” that we must model.***

- ***The clear alternative to imitating Paul is seen in this verse:*** “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ”. ***It is not a small thing at all to follow others in place of Paul. To do so is to become an “enemy of the cross of Christ”! How many understand this today in our anti-Pauline day and time. So many have “itching ears” and follow after anyone with a worldly credential instead of the pure teaching exhorted here.***
- ***Carnality is the consequence of this Paul writes. And peace is promised. What a great promise this is. The God of peace would be with us.***
- ***There are many more examples (six here) where the apostle directly exhorts in the same fashion. His exhortations to imitate him are often found in his letters:***

1 Cor. 4:16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

Eph. 5:1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children

1 Thess. 1:6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost

1 Thess. 2:14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews

2 Thess. 3:7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you

2 Thess. 3:9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

- ***Though translated “followers” in the KJV, the meaning of the Greek word μιμητής is "mimic". “Followers together” is found only here in Phil. 3:17 συμμιμητής, or,***

to mimic or imitate jointly or together. Most blessed we would be if we consistently did just that!

- *Then the final exhortation in Paul's last letter should seal this teaching to our hearts:*

2 Tim. 3:10-14

10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,

11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of [them] all the Lord delivered me.

12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned [them] . . .

- *Here in Paul final letter, written just before he was martyred, we writes so powerfully of the coming times within which we are living today. And it is much more than practical matters of godly living that he mentions here. It is his doctrine, his purpose, his faith and all the virtues of his Christian living while suffering the persecutions that always follow that kind of testimony.*

However, for a life like the apostle exhorts of Timothy (and each of us, of course) much power from God will be required:

III. What is the Power Behind Paul's Example? It is the very resurrection power of Christ Jesus manifested through Paul himself, and each believer:

- *So we have come to the final place here in our teaching today, and the final teaching here in Philippians. There were many verses in this letter where he mentioned the power of God in us and how God is working today under grace. That power is the enabling by Christ and the Spirit that provides the “dynamic” or empowering we all need in this life — if we would be imitators of him:*

READ] Phil. 2:14-16

14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

- ***As the sufficient provision of God is received with thanksgiving in every circumstance of our lives, we may run the race honorably, until, we pray, the prize is finally secured.***
- ***Paul's "grace" is being distributed through this letter to the believers in Philippi and everywhere since the word IS powerful. (1:2, 1:7, 4:23). Like thanksgiving, it multiplies as it is shared. Most precious indeed, and it is so encouraging, isn't it?***

Conclusion:

- ***Running the race to the finish must be our central focus never taking our attention off of Christ as displayed by the apostle. The many practical consequences of this "walk" or "run" are to be enjoyed everywhere, even through BOTH abundance AND need. For through it all we may in mind, soul and spirit be united together with one another in the same "struggle" Paul was engaged in.***
- ***Abounding spiritual enabling is resurrection power, or, life from the dead. It demands Our willing reception to be active as God would have us to be, lights wherever we go. But just as the great work is his, though our works follow his enabling, also the glory is his, though we shall also be glorified together with him:***

Phil. 4:18-20

18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things [which were sent] from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

20 Now unto God and our Father [be] glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Amen!