

## The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians

The goal of this Bible Class is to give the students a working knowledge of the Epistle to the Philippians. It is based on an expository approach to teaching the Bible, preparing the students for the worship of our Savior. The various lessons are to be viewed by the teacher as thematic suggestions to help with preparation. While the lessons are not intended to be read to the class word for word, the main ideas should be the substance of what is taught. The teacher, in preparation for the class, should consider reading through the whole curriculum before beginning the class, as well as the book of Philippians several times. This will provide the instructor with a broad and comprehensive understanding of the Epistle as it is being taught.

It is important that the instructor be not only knowledgeable about the material, but also able to teach it with enthusiasm and conviction. Students best learn from teachers that are themselves excited about the Scriptures. The use of maps, diagrams, white boards etc. is extremely helpful. Some of these have been provided in the curriculum. It is suggested that the class be conducted in an interactive manner. This can be accomplished by having them read short portions of the scripture texts, asking them questions, and wholeheartedly encouraging them to ask questions. All students should be encouraged to bring a Bible to class. The students will be provided with a handout for each lesson which includes some blanks and a few true/false questions to be filled in/answered while the lesson is being taught. Some of the answers will be found in the text of the lesson underlined and in **bold** and *italicized* type. It may be helpful to the students to write the answers on the white board as you work through the lesson.

The inclusion of the Westminster Shorter Catechism as part of the curriculum is designed to help the students acquire a broad understanding of Christian doctrine along with the specific Bible teaching. The Elders of the church will coordinate the specific questions and answers to be used in the class.

It will become evident to the teacher that this course curriculum, while not dealing with every verse and concept in the book of Philippians is comprehensive and deeply theological. It is designed to help the students understand the books in their wider biblical context, with emphasis on its place in the redemptive history of God's covenant people. The students will be confronted with and asked to understand and remember some difficult concepts. It should be remembered that children are able to comprehend much more than we often give them credit for.

While this class will be a challenge for both the teacher and the students, the rewards for the efforts of those in the class will be surprising and exciting.

# **The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians**

## **Lesson 1 – Introduction, Background and Chapters 1-2**

### **Class Objectives**

- 1) To introduce the students to the author, recipients, historical context and overall scope of the Epistle to the Philippians;**
- 2) To instruct the students regarding biblical principles, exhortations, and commands in the first two chapters**

❖ **Greetings** – Pray with the students for the Lord’s blessing on their class this term

### ❖ **Attendance and Accountability**

Introduce yourself

Introduce your substitute teacher

The teacher is asked to take attendance at the beginning of each class period in order to provide encouragement and extra help to students when they miss a class.

Make sure all class members know each other’s **names**.

**Requirements** – Writing utensils, Bibles, a good night’s sleep

There will be **questions asked** regarding the outlines of the books and some other material

**Memory verses** will be assigned

We will take **attendance** each week and have some **accountability** questions as well. For the next few weeks, the question will be, “**Have you gotten a good night’s sleep, brought your Bible and writing materials, worked on your memorization, and done any other assigned homework?**”

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism** – Briefly go over the question(s) and answer(s) for this quarter.

### ❖ **Schedule**

This lesson will be one of introduction to the Epistle to the Philippians. The remainder of the epistle will be taught next week. Lesson 2 is from Philippians 3 and 4, and is titled: “Pressing Toward the Goal”

### ❖ **Lesson, pt 1 – Introduction to the Philippian Epistle**

The book of Philippians is another epistle in the Apostle Paul’s “What it Means to Be a Member of the New Covenant” series of letters to 1<sup>st</sup>-century New Covenant believers. As a standalone epistle, Philippians carries wonderful merit and is an

encouragement to Christians of all eras. Taken as one of the “series”, however, this epistle takes on even greater meaning, as it builds upon the case Paul makes in other letters regarding the “newness” of the New Covenant, the necessity of perceiving and resisting the insidiousness of anti-Christian Judaism, of biblically breaking with the Old Covenant, and living as a citizen of the new Kingdom Age.

As is the case with many books of Scripture, the epistle to the Philippians is rich in its complexity. While it is not evidently chiasmic in its literary structure, Philippians has several repetitive and persistent “chords”, which serve as thematic-didactic reminders of God’s will for His children. Like a symphony rich with instruments and overlapping musical themes, “listening” to Philippians often and with an open ear will serve believers well, as these themes will become clearer and increasingly edifying.

### **Background – Acts 16:6-40**

The epistle to the Philippians is named as such, being written to saints living in **Philippi**, a key Roman garrison colony in Macedonia. Located near gold mines, this prosperous city was a hub of economic activity in the Greek and Roman world.

Being prohibited by the Spirit to preach the gospel in Asia, Paul first visited Philippi around AD 49 or 50 on his first missionary journey to Europe with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, the author of Acts (see Acts 16:13, “*we* went out of the city to the riverside...”). There Paul and his companions met **Lydia**, a seller of purple (either the fabric itself, or the chemical used to dye fabric), from Thyatira. Lydia was likely a prosperous woman, and after the Lord opened her heart to hear the gospel, she invited Paul and his fellows to stay at her house, establishing the first church in Philippi (and Europe).

Staying there “for some days” (Acts 16:12), Paul and Silas went to pray regularly at the riverside. Each day, a demon-possessed slave girl, having the power of divination, followed them; calling out after them, she raucously identified them as God’s servants to all who heard her. This happened “for many days” (ch. 16:18). As he tried with Jesus (see Luke 4:41), Satan often employs a tactic of publicly exposing (or “outing”) Christians, shining the light of publicity on them in order to discredit them, and bring them into disrepute with civil or ecclesiastical authorities. Paul however, silenced the demon and cast the evil spirit from the girl, thus freeing her from Satan’s power, and ending his – and her masters’ – exploitation of her.

The Philippian authorities took immediate notice and recognized the economic, spiritual, and political threat posed by the “coming” of Jesus to this city; seizing

Paul and Silas, they beat them and cast them into prison. Satan for the moment seemed to have gained the upper hand, having retaliated at God for freeing his slave, and having silenced Jesus' servants. Yet Paul and Silas could not be silenced, even in prison. At midnight, they were heard throughout the prison singing hymns to God (v. 25). In answer to their prayers, the Lord sent a great earthquake, shaking the foundations of the prison and loosing Paul and Silas' – and all the prisoners' – chains (v. 26). As a result of His display of power and vindication of His servants, the Lord opened the fearful heart of **the jailer**, and he and all his household were joyfully baptized into the faith (v. 27-33). Paul and Silas were then shown kindness, ministered to, and fed by the jailer and his family, who become Jesus' instruments of blessing rather than persecution (v. 34).

This is a pattern in biblical history. YHWH God frequently takes hold of His world, and in response to the praises and prayers of his faithful people shakes it in order to remove those things which are not of Him, causing the things that are of Him to be firmly established (Heb. 12:26-28; Rev. 8:3-5). The Red Sea crossing (Exod. 14), the destruction of Korah (Num. 16), the conquering of Jericho (Josh. 6), and many other works of YHWH testify to His power and justice, and His providential rule over the creation as He puts down the mighty from their thrones, and exalts His own people (Luke 1:51-52). Those who trust in Him shall neither be shaken nor forsaken (Ps.125:1).

The Philippian epistle carries a similar message throughout its pages. The Lord Jesus Christ protects, blesses, saves, raises, glorifies, and provides for His people who trust in Him, in spite of their persecutors' attempts to stifle their witness and silence the gospel (Phil. 1:12-18,28-30). Just as Jesus was exalted by God the Father through his obedience to death (Phil. 2:5-11), believers also gain the victory in enduring all manner of hardships and death (Phil. 3:7-14, 21).

Humbly denying ourselves and living for Christ is the means of victory and exaltation, and His means of judging of the wicked and saving the world (Phil. 2:14-18). In the midst of all the trials of life, He is near His people to strengthen, encourage, and quiet our souls, and provide for all our needs in this world (Phil. 4:4-20). Christ is magnified in the Church and her members' lives, whether by life or death (ch.1:11-20; 2:11; 4:20).

## ❖ Lesson, pt 2 – Philippians 1-2: Suffering, Humility and the mind of Christ

### Memory Verse:

“According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**” Phil. 1:20-21

### ❖ Chapter 1

#### Verses 1-2: Salutation

Written from during Paul’s imprisonment in **Rome** around the year **A.D. 60** (cf. Acts 28), the Philippian letter begins with Paul introducing himself and his comrade, **Timothy**. Frequently Paul wrote letters with close companions or friends at his side, who often conveyed his writings to the recipients in person. In making the letter a joint one, Paul thus demonstrated his fellowship and solidarity with his fellow workers, as well as commending them to the church at large.

Paul here salutes the church, and identifies those, to whom he is writing, as “...all the saints who are in Philippi.” Additionally, the apostle addresses another group who would certainly have an interest in his communication with the church: the bishops and deacons of Philippi, who are the leaders of the church.

In order to remind believers of his connection to Jesus, his authority, and care for the churches, more often than not Paul opens his epistles by including a brief reminder of his apostolic authority. Here however, it is noteworthy that in his address to the Philippians Paul calls himself (and Timothy) a “servant” – literally, “bondslave” – of Jesus Christ. This is in accord with one of the primary themes of the epistle: offering humble service to Christ. As Jesus did not exalt himself, but rather took upon himself the form of a slave, so are we to humble ourselves as his slaves (ch.2:5-11).

Next, as he does in each of his epistles, Paul pronounces a blessing upon the church: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Blessing the church in this manner presupposes Paul’s apostolic authority to declare and announce God’s grace to the world. Not only does this assume the authority of the apostle, it also assumes the relationship of the apostle to his Lord and benefactor, and Paul’s responsibility and right to speak for Him. Note that it is a plural blessing from a plural source: the Triune God. Jesus and the Father – Who along with the Holy Spirit – while distinct in their functional roles in the

“economic Trinity,” are equal in their power to supply the Church with grace, peace, and all manner of temporal and eternal blessings.

### **Reformation Covenant Church Distinctive: Two Church Offices**

This salutation of Paul to the Philippian church in verse 1 clearly identifies the two offices Christ has established for the nurture and guarding of his flock: bishops and deacons.

The office of “bishop” or “overseer” is the equivalent of “elder”, as is seen in Acts 20:17-28. Here we see that the bishop or overseer’s responsibility is to pastor/shepherd the church, guarding her from wolves and building her up in holiness as the bride of Jesus. Additionally Paul uses the terms “bishop” and “elder” interchangeably in Titus 1:1-7 (see also 1 Timothy 3:1, cf. 1 Tim. 5:17).

When Paul gives instruction to Timothy regarding the qualifications for church office, he denotes two offices: bishop and deacon (1 Tim. 3:1-7, 8-13). Many churches utilize three (or sometimes even four) offices: ministers, elders, and deacons. RCC utilizes just two: elder and deacon. The two-office position of church administration also mirrors the administration of the early apostolic church in Acts 6, in which ecclesiastical duties were divided between the apostles – who ministered the Word – and the seven deacons, who “served tables” (Acts 6:1-7).

Note: While RCC currently only has two paid pastors on staff, all of her elders are equal in their office and all equally perform multiple pastoral functions, including teaching, counseling, ruling, leading worship, administration of sacraments, etc.

### **Verses 3-11: Prayer for the Church**

Paul prays for the Philippians, having confidence in the Lord in His maturation of his people. God’s sovereign grace calls, sustains, and perfects us (ch.1:6, 2:12-13). Martin Luther said, “...I cannot, by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith” (Small Catechism, q.15). As David sings in Psalm 138, “The Lord will perfect that which concerns me” (Ps. 138:8).

In verse 6, Paul expresses confidence that God will keep His promises, and not turn back from His oath to Christ, and His Church (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 6:13-19). The three perspectives of Christ’s salvation are justification, sanctification, and

glorification. These are affirmed to belong to the Philippian Christians in these verses: God began a good work (justification); he will complete it (sanctification), until the day of Jesus Christ (glorification). While he is assured by God's promise, yet Paul prays for His promise to be manifest in the life of the Church, and that they demonstrate the gifts and calling of God and magnify Christ (v.9-11). The promises and commands of God are not opposed to one another; in fact they are inextricably – and mysteriously – entwined (ch.2:12-13). As John Calvin said, "Certainly things which are connected together by no means mutually destroy each other" (Calvin's Institutes, Book 3; ch.2).

### **Verses 12-26: The Magnification and Preeminence of Christ**

Paul rejoices in his imprisonment, and shares with the Philippians that it has led to the testimony of Christ in Caesar's palace, and the conversion of a number of members of the emperor's house. Additionally, Paul glorifies God for the attacks by the Jews, who wished to add to Paul's afflictions by speaking of Jesus, but their intentions were turned upside down by God, and Christ and the Gospel were magnified, rather than impugned (see Ps. 124).

Paul goes on to declare his expectation that he will never be truly ashamed or disappointed in Christ; he expects instead that Christ will be glorified in whatever circumstances God leads him through. While he would rather live in the flesh and continue ministering to the church, if he must die for Christ then he is content, since "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (ch.1:21). Paul again and again confirms to his readers that Christ is central to his life on earth. He goes as far as to say that he would rather die ("depart") and be with Christ, being "hard pressed" to decide which he would prefer, death or life.

This portends the Council of Nicea's declaration in the Creed, "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." Believers in Jesus, even while laboring in the Lord and expecting fruit and victory on earth, anticipate their transition from earth to heaven, and fleshly bodies transformed to spiritual bodies (I Cor. 15). We recognize that it is Christ Who is our true dwelling place, as He is our abode both here and in eternity. "Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's...He is the Lord of both the dead and the living." (Romans 14:8-9). This is the heart of the everlasting covenant God has made with us as His people, just as He declared to Abram, "Do not be afraid...I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (Gen. 15:1), and later as YHWH declares, "...I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (2 Cor.6:14-17).



### **Verses 27-30: Victory Through Suffering**

Paul exhorts the Philippians to be steadfast in their afflictions, and contend together for the faith of the gospel, unfrightened by their adversaries. It is vital to remember that the Jesus' Church has real, flesh and blood enemies. They are not merely Christ's enemies: they are our personal enemies also. Recall that the name of the old Serpent "Satan" means "Adversary"; as such, his seed (children) is continually at enmity with the Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15, John 8:37-44).

God grants believers the privilege of suffering for Christ. As we stand in the truth of Jesus, this is a token proof of our salvation and of His judgment of the wicked (v.28). Frequently in the Psalms and other Scriptures, the glory of God and the salvation of the Church is manifested by the perdition and destruction of her adversaries (see Psalm 7, 11, 17, 83, etc.). When God rises to judge His enemies, His salvation is revealed, and His Church is exalted (Matt. 13:43).

### **❖ Chapter 2**

#### **Humility, Obedience, Other-Esteem & Love: The Means of Steadfast Faith**

This section of the letter carries a loose chiasmic A-B-B-A structure. The first A section begins with an exhortation for the saints to be in close fellowship, affection, and love, and to consider the interests of one another rather than acting in sheer self-interest, like Jesus did. On the very night he was betrayed, not long after a dispute arose among the disciples about who was the greatest, Jesus took a towel and in servant fashion washed their feet (John 13:1-17). By doing this, Jesus demonstrated His confidence in the Father's exaltation of Him, and also displayed the type of agape love and service that we His followers are to exercise. "Let this [Christ's] mind be in you..." Paul says.

In the corresponding A' section, he reminds them of the Christ-like love and regard that **Timothy** and **Epaphroditus** have for them, and tells them to receive and highly regard these men, who, like Jesus, did not act in self interest. Both of these men showed agape love and service to the saints, not caring for themselves, but rather sacrificing their own well-being for the sake of the Church.

Both of the B and B' sections turn attention to those who are held up as examples in humility, obedience, and self-sacrificial service, specifically Jesus and Paul. In the first B section, Paul reminds the Philippians of the example of Jesus, who obediently humbled Himself before God the Father. In response to Jesus' humiliation – both in putting aside his rightful glory as God the Son, and also in his obedience to death – God the Father exalted Jesus and gave him the name above all names, so that the entire creation and every individual creature in it will

acknowledge Jesus as Lord. In the second B' section Paul exhorts the Church again to be obedient, blameless and harmless, and do all things without complaining or strife, so he can rejoice in his own self-sacrifice for them, knowing that they will be exalted through his own humiliation on their behalf.

A. Unity and Other-Esteem: Jesus (v. 1-5)

B. Obedience, Humility and Self-Sacrifice: Jesus (v. 6-11)

B' Obedience, Humility and Self-Sacrifice: The Church (v. 12-18)

A' Unity and Other-Esteem: The Church (v. 19-30)

### **Lesson Summary**

The Philippian church was born during a time of satanic oppression and persecution against Paul and Silas. Through Paul's suffering, the Philippians were provided a living example of Christ Jesus, who did not live for or serve Himself, but rather God the Father. Paul not only tells the church, but demonstrates by his very life that "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." We gain the victory through suffering, not in escaping it.

Because of what Jesus has done, we are to follow His example, humbling ourselves before God and one another, and serve each other sacrificially.

**The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians**  
**Lesson 1 – Introduction and Chapters 1-2**

**Class Objectives**

- 1) To introduce the author, recipients, historical context and overall scope of the Epistle to the Philippians;
- 2) To apply the biblical principles, exhortations, and commands in the first two chapters

❖ **Greetings**

❖ **Attendance and Accountability**

**Requirements** – Writing utensils, Bibles, a good night’s sleep

**Memory verses** will be assigned

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

❖ **Schedule** – Today – Introduction to the Pastoral Epistles

Week 2 – Philippians Conclusion

❖ **Lesson – Introduction, Background, and Chapters 1-2**

**A. Authorship –**

Who wrote Philippians? \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ v. 1-2

**B. Historical / Geographical Context**

1. Time

- Philippians was written by Paul during his first imprisonment around the year

\_\_\_\_\_?

2. Place written from –

Paul was in \_\_\_\_\_ when he wrote Philippians

3. History of Church

What did Paul encounter during his stay in Philippi, and who was the first convert? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was the second convert, and how did the conversion happen? \_\_\_\_\_

**C. The Message of Philippians**

4. How does this apply to the situation Paul finds himself in as he is writing to the Philippians?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Finish this sentence of Paul’s: “For to me to live is Christ, and \_\_\_\_\_.”

6. What motivated the humiliation of Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What was the result of his humiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Who were the two servants of Christ that Paul held up as examples of service? \_\_\_\_\_

and \_\_\_\_\_.

**The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians**  
**Lesson 2 – Chapters 3-4**  
**“Pressing Toward the Goal”**

**Class Objectives**

- 1) **To instruct the students regarding the biblical nature of the change from the Old to the New Covenant, and the correlation of continuity/discontinuity between the two historical periods;**
- 2) **To make application of the biblical principles, exhortations, and commands in the final two chapters**

❖ **Greetings** – Pray with the students for the Lord’s blessing on their class this term

❖ **Attendance and Accountability**

Introduce yourself

Introduce your substitute teacher

The teacher is asked to take attendance at the beginning of each class period in order to provide encouragement and extra help to students when they miss a class.

Make sure all class members know each other’s **names**.

**Requirements** – Writing utensils, Bibles, a good night’s sleep

There will be **questions asked** regarding the outlines of the books and some other material

**Memory Verse:**

“According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**” Phil. 1:20-21

We will take **attendance** each week and have some **accountability** questions as well. For the next few weeks, the question will be, “**Have you gotten a good night’s sleep, brought your Bible and writing materials, worked on your memorization, and done any other assigned homework?**”

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism** – Briefly go over the question(s) and answer(s) for this quarter.

❖ **Schedule**

This lesson will be the closing to the Epistle to the Philippians. Lesson 2 is from Philippians 3 and 4, and is titled: “Pressing Toward the Goal”

## ❖ Lesson – Philippians 3-4: Pressing Toward the Goal

Although still in the middle of the epistle, Chapter 3 actually begins the concluding section of the book of Philippians, in which Paul focuses on how he – and the church – must die to contemporary Judaism, and live only to Christ. Following a series of warnings to the church, Paul encourages them to stand firm and gives them instructions which elucidate how they must actually “work out” their salvation (ch.2:12-13).

“Finally,” Paul writes, beginning his summation and the practical application of his encouraging message to them. In chapters 1 and 2, Paul has presented the suffering and exalted Christ, recounted his own and his companions’ sufferings, and demonstrated that humility is the path to victory. In chapters 3 and 4, Paul exhorts the Philippian church to rejoice, remember, reject, reach forward, remain resolute, and rest in Christ.

### ❖ Rejoice in the Lord – Again (and Again and Again)!

#### Remember – Again (and Again and Again)!

“Finally...rejoice...” Paul commands the believers, with a reminder to them of what he has already said previously. Rather than being “tedious,” though, Paul says that repetition is “safe.” There is real and secure haven for Christians in recalling and repeating foundational truth; as Matthew Henry writes in his commentary on Philippians 3:1,

“It is good for us often to hear the same truths, to revive the remembrance and strengthen the impression of things of importance. It is a wanton curiosity to desire always to hear some new thing.”

The whole book of Deuteronomy, in fact, is a recapitulation of the original covenant made by YHWH at Sinai in Exodus 19-23, and a reiteration of His law. The adult generation which came out of Egypt 40 years before had died in the wilderness, and a new generation was assuming their place as new heirs of the Covenant and the Promised Land.

Three times in the final section of Philippians, Paul repeats the command for his readers to rejoice (ch.3:1, 3; ch.4:4). This triplet of rejoicing that Paul enjoins is neither a state of mind nor of heart, per se; rather, to “rejoice in the Lord” here means to take joy and hope in our relationship to Jesus, and the position in which we find ourselves in the New Covenant. Just as the generation of Exodus believers had left Egypt 40 years before, wandering in the wilderness, and who now were on

the verge of entering Canaan, the Philippians had embarked on their own Exodus out of their own Egypt (Judaism) and were at the threshold of a new Land. They were no longer citizens of the first Covenant, which was passing away, but of the New Covenant, which was “better” (Heb.8:6).

It is clear that at this point in covenant history Paul is acting as a New Moses, preparing to ascend Pisgah, “to depart and be with Christ” (ch.1:23), and to rest with his fathers, awaiting and hoping for the Resurrection from the dead. Hence Paul’s Prison Epistles serve largely as a “New Deuteronomy,” reminding the Gentile Church of the approaching excommunication of their unfaithful predecessors (the Judaizers), and their pending conquest of the world as faithful members of the New Covenant. It is this reality that brings joy to the believer.

First-century Jews – and Jewish proselytes – who were still hoping in and clinging to the Old Age of Levitical rites and sacraments were about to be dispossessed and destroyed (ch.3:19). Only those who choose to set their minds on Jesus, and “rejoice in their relation to Christ and interest in him” (Henry) will be preserved and inherit the kingdom. This is what Paul desires the Philippians to remember. “Rejoice in the Lord,” therefore, he says, “and again...Rejoice!” (ch.4:4).

#### ❖ **Reject the Old – Reach for the New (v.4-9)**

Paul continues his exhortation by reminding the Philippians of his own past and his previous exploits in Judaism, and also his renunciation of it. Of all of the Jews, Paul had more reason to hope in his status than any of his contemporaries. As an “Hebrew of Hebrews,” he calls himself, Paul’s pedigree was immaculate: “born and bred” a Jew, circumcised the eighth day, a Benjamite, a Pharisee, unrivaled in zeal, **“blameless” in obeying the law, and in attention to the details of the Levitical liturgical code.**

Yet the things which may have been profitable to Paul for his advancement in Judaism were accounted as being to no advantage. Worse yet, Paul regarded his pedigree and accomplishments as an encumbrance to his worship of God, and therefore these were counted as **“rubbish” (literally “offal”, food only suited for being thrown to dogs, cf. v.2).** The righteousness of obedience to the Levitical system of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews was in fact no righteousness at all. That system was designed to be shadowy prefigurement and primitive substitute of Christ and His work, which now had been fulfilled. Paul rejected the ostensible advantages of Judaism and the righteousness of the law in order to “gain Christ and be found in him,” having “the righteousness which is from God by faith” in Jesus (v.9).

**Obeying Jesus call (Acts 9),** Paul rejects the old, and reaches forward to the new.

### **“Beware of Dogs!”**

Paul warns the Philippian church in verse 2, “Beware of dogs!” This warning refers to the “evil workers” of Judaism, the Pharisee dogs. Harking back to the Old Covenant Hebrew Scriptures, Paul uses language that evokes images of the Jews who crucified Jesus, of whom David prophesied in Psalm 22:15-17:

“For **dogs** have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones...They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots. But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; Deliver...My precious life from the power of the **dog**.”

The prophet Isaiah also used the word “**dogs**” to describe the greedy, self-centered leaders of Israel in his day:

“...they are greedy **dogs**, which never have enough...they are shepherds who cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his own gain” (Is. 56:11).

Paul therefore employs this fitting biblical term, since it is the evil Jewish “**dogs**” which are barking, biting, and hounding the Philippian Church, of whom they are told to “beware.” Concerned only with preserving their nation, status, and way of life (Jn.11:47-50), **like gluttonous beasts, the Judaizers’ “...god is their belly and...who mind earthly things”** (ch.3:19). For Paul, leaving behind Judaism is akin to throwing out garbage (“offal”), which is fit only for the dogs (ch.3:8).

### **❖ Reach For the New – Reject the Old (3:10-4:1)**

Paul carries on in his Old-to-New discourse, and further describes his desire to move forward toward the goal of the New Covenant: Resurrection. It is Paul’s passion, “by any means,” to be raised in and with Christ. To “know Him and the power of His resurrection” is a present-day reality for Paul, and for the Christian.

By means of Christ’s perfect life, our righteousness is gained; by means of His suffering and death, our sins are atoned for; by means of His resurrection we have new life and are justified in our position before God, now and eternally. Jesus was “delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Justified before God, now we have new life and walk uprightly, confident in our acceptance by God in Christ. This is what life in the body is about: knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection, in our day-to-day lives. This is how Paul can say with assurance, “For to me to live is Christ” (ch.1:21). Jesus death not only was an *individual* death, it also was a *corporate* death. Since

Jesus is the head of both the Old and New Covenants, His death represented and definitively accomplished the death of the Old Covenant (and its attendant Levitical system), and inaugurated the New Covenant. Thus, the old Church “died” in Christ, and was raised from the dead as a New Man, now living in a New Age, and given a New Covenant.

More than this though, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead – in the body – also portends and assures the Christian’s own resurrection from the dead. Because Jesus died and was raised, we also will be raised after our death. “I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (Jn.11:25-26). Paul says that the ultimate goal of his pressing on – his “forgetting” and his “reaching forward” – is the “upward call” of God, the Resurrection. This “goal” actually has already been definitively accomplished for the Christian in this present age, and will be finally realized at the Last Day (1 Cor. 15:22-23; 1 Jn 3:2).

Just as Paul began this section of his letter with a warning against Judaism, he repeats this warning in verses 17-19, and exhorts the Philippian saints to follow his example and pattern (v.17), eschewing the Old Covenant law and its worship just as he did (v.7-8). Paul pulls no punches in his description of the obstinate unconverted Jews, not merely considering them outsiders but rather “enemies of the cross of Christ” (v.18). Being partakers of the sacrificial offerings, they worship “their belly” as their god; failing to lift their eyes from the symbols and shadows of Levitical worship up toward Christ, these men “set their minds on earthly things” (v.19). Unwilling to embark on an Exodus out of Judaism (the new Egypt), they are destined for judgment, and their “end is destruction” (v.19).

The writer to the Hebrews echoes this theme, reminding his readers about the example set by faithful church leaders, and warning the church about clinging idolatrously to the so-called blessings of the Old Covenant sacraments:

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct...it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us



go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”

In verses 20-21 Paul closes with an encouraging reminder that the Philippian believers’ **citizenship is not on earth – in Israel – but rather in heaven**, where Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father. In Christ, now that the New Covenant has come we are no longer citizens of this realm: “My kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus said (Jn. 19:14). Just like the Philippians and the Hebrew saints we also have “no continuing city” on earth, but belong to and eagerly “seek the one to come.” As former sons of Adam, we know that our present realm of sin is destined for destruction under the judgment of God. Now as sons of God and citizens of the New Jerusalem we must leave the old city behind and follow Jesus, eagerly awaiting His return and our resurrection, so that we might live in His presence forever. Therefore, as the beloved of God we are to “stand fast in the Lord” (ch.4:1).

### **The Christian as “I/We”**

Paul’s discourse here in chapter 3 highlights the fact that the life of a Christian is lived out as an individual, in the context of a community, the Church. He speaks freely and frequently in first person singular, using “**I**” language to describe his life and work as an apostle. Paul says, “...**I** have counted...**I** have suffered...**I** press on...” as he communicates personally about his relationship to Christ. This demonstrates how the Christian life is one of individual thoughts, passions, reasoning, decisions, and actions.

Along with that, Paul uses first person plural, “**we**” language, to describe the Church’s actions as a corporate body, a community of individuals. “Let **us**...have this mind; “**we**” have attained; “let **us** walk by the same rule.” He even says that upon His appearance, Jesus “will transform **our** lowly body,” indicating that even the Resurrection is not merely for the individual; rather the Christian body is corporate, and will be raised together when Jesus returns (see 1 Thess.4:17).

Therefore a *personal* faith in Christ is not an exclusively *individual* faith; rather, the Christian’s faith is inclusive of both the individual and the covenant community (local and global) he is a member of. There is no disharmony between these truths. When asked about the apparent irreconcilability of opposing doctrines, Spurgeon replied, “I do not need to reconcile friends.” And John Calvin said, “Certainly things which are connected together do not mutually destroy each other” (Inst. Book 3, Ch.2, para.25). Thus the Christian lives a life both of “**I**” and “**We**.”

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## ❖ **Unity, Joy, Moderation, Peace, and Contentment** (i.e., *The “Rest” of the Story*)

The final section of Philippians is a series of exhortations that are reminiscent of the promise and pledge of “shalom” (peace) that YHWH gives His people at various times in the Old Testament. This shalom or peace is not merely safety from enemies, but is a holistic concept that also carries the ideas of unity, joy, completeness, and rest.

### **Unity: vs. 2-3**

After the exhortation to the church to abandon the Old and lay hold of the New, the apostle Paul writes a personal note to two Christians in Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche. It is believed that these two believers were both **women, who supported Paul in his ministry**, and who were now somehow at odds with one another. As he did earlier in his letter to the church at large (ch.1:27, 2:2), Paul exhorts these women to “be of the same mind.” Being of the same or one mind means not only acting according to a single purpose, but also carries the connotation of thinking and judging alike (the Greek phrase “το αὐτο” is translated “the same;” without the article “αὐτο” literally means “self”).

Paul acknowledges his kinship with these women, with Clement, and his other fellow workers, as well as an unnamed companion whom he calls “true yoke-fellow (could this be Lydia?). **All of these Philippian believers’ names are in the Book of Life**, Paul says. While it may seem strange that anyone would declare who is – or is not – written in YHWH’s Book of Life (Ex. 32:32-33), Paul seems to know for certain the contents of a secret, divine volume. God’s Book of Life, however, is not a secret, sublime, or subjective reality: it is an objective reality, a “registration” based on God’s covenant promises to His people, who are joined to Christ. The lengthy genealogies of the Old and New Testaments (Gen. 4, Gen. 10, Ex.2, 1 Chr.1-9, Matt.1, Luke 3) testify to the fact that all believers who are members of the Covenant people are recorded by God in the Book of Life, as belonging to Him. Paul is merely making the case that all members of the Church, including the Philippians, by virtue of their union with Christ in His Body belong in this Book. In saying so he states his unity with them, as they are bound to Christ.

### **Joy & Moderation: v.4-5**

“Rejoice in the Lord,” Paul charges the church; then, in order to emphasize his command, he repeats it, “Again, I say, “Rejoice!” The Philippians may have been subject to despair, having been among the poorest of believers (2 Cor. 8:1-2), as well as being subject to persecutions which Paul alludes to earlier in his letter (ch.1:29). **Every moment and circumstance** demands joy, however. Just as

YHWH commanded His people to rejoice before Him in festal joy (Deut.14:26), Jesus commanded His disciples to rejoice in persecutions (Luke 6:23). Joy is always the appropriate and obedient response of the believer.

The Philippians' joy, though, is tempered by moderation, which Paul desires all men to know. A better translation of this word is actually "gentleness." As believers rejoice, they do so humbly, acknowledging the sovereignty of God, His immanent presence and rule over all, and our appearance before Him one Day. Matthew Henry comments,

"The consideration of our Master's approach, and our final account, should keep us from smiting our fellow-servants, support us under present sufferings, and moderate our affections to outward good."

John Calvin, writing of the joy believers should carry, says

"Let this be your strength and stability, to rejoice in the Lord, and that, too, not for a moment merely, but so that your joy in him may be perpetuated. For unquestionably it differs from the joy of the world in this respect – that we know from experience that the joy of the world is deceptive, frail, and fading, and Christ even pronounces it to be accursed (Luke 6:25). Hence, that only is a settled joy in God which is such as is never taken away from us."

### **Peace: v. 6-9**

Paul commands the Philippians to have no fear or anxiety, and to **deploy prayer as a means of guarding the heart and mind** from them. The Christian is to be "anxious for nothing," praying about "everything...with thanksgiving." The resulting peace that comes to us is nothing less than the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (v. 6). This is certainly the full and holistic peace Isaiah refers to in his prayer to YHWH, "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Is. 26:19). When we fix our minds on God, trusting in His fatherly care and loving mercy, He blesses us with a peace that transcends all human knowledge and comprehension.

Not only are we to fix our minds on God by means of prayer, we are to consider His word and His works in history on behalf of His people. These are the things which are "true...noble...just...pure...lovely...of good report," having the qualities of "virtue," and being "praise-worthy." Paul commands us, "think on these things" (v.8). **Meditation on YHWH's works and his law is the Christian's defense**

against Satan and his wiles, and the means by which believers are guarded from the counsel, paths, and habitations of wicked men (Ps.1:1-2, Ps.77).

Additionally, the examples of faithful men are to be considered and followed. “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Heb 13:7). Things taught, received, heard and seen are to be minded. Paul appends the command with a promise, “and the God of peace shall be with you” (v.9). So it is the presence of the “God of peace” that affords us the “peace of God.”

### **Contentment: v.10-20**

In his closing exhortation, Paul commends the Philippians for their care for him, and reminds them of the contentment he enjoys even while in need. Paul understands that his satisfaction and happiness is independent of circumstances, but is rather dependent on Christ and His presence. **Paul knows “how to be abased, and how to abound” (v.12)**, and declares confidently “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (v.13).

He goes on to remind the Philippians of God’s pleasure in their gifts to him (v.18). This is a good reminder to us of our need to provide for other believers in need, whether near or far (Heb.13:1-3; Gal.6:10). Loving and caring for other believers is evidence to us and to the world of our relationship to God and of His fatherly care for His children (1 Jn.3:14,16). As we do reach out and care for our brethren in need, God in turn supplies our own needs out of “His riches in glory” (v.19). As David declared, “Blessed is he who considers the poor; the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble” (Ps.41:1). “He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given” (Prov. 19:17); this is all to the praise and glory of God (v.20).

### **Farewell & Benediction: v.21-23**

Paul closes his letter with a command to greet every saint (v.21). Not only are we to be kindly affectionate toward the church in general, but also to each individual saint whose name is in the Book of Life. It is always appropriate to greet saints, and to give greetings in the name of saints. This assumes that we are not only to offer but also to receive the respects and good wishes given to us through other believers. The letter’s final benediction is a mirror of his opening salutation, as in the manner of a double-witness Paul repeats his pronouncement of blessing upon all the Philippians: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

**The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians**  
**Lesson 2 – Chapters 3-4: “Pressing Toward the Goal”**

**Class Objectives**

- 1) To grow in knowledge of and gratitude for the historic and covenantal changes brought about by the coming of Jesus in the New Covenant**
- 2) To apply the biblical principles, exhortations, and commands in the last two chapters**

❖ **Greetings**

❖ **Attendance and Accountability**

**Requirements** – Writing utensils, Bibles, a good night’s sleep

**Memory verses** will be reviewed

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

❖ **Schedule** – Today Week 2 – Philippians Conclusion

❖ **Lesson – Rejoice in Christ, Reject the Past, Reach Forward**

**A. Rejoice in Christ, Reject the Past**

1. Why does Paul use the term “dogs” to refer to the Judaizers? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What did Paul previously rejoice in? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How and when did this change? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What does he call his previous accomplishments? \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Reach Forward**

1. What is Paul’s goal? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Of what nation or kingdom is Paul a citizen? \_\_\_\_\_ Why does he emphasize this?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**C. Unity, Joy, Moderation, Peace and Contentment**

1. Euodia and Syntyche were two \_\_\_\_\_ in Philippi. Besides Paul’s letter to the Philippians, where else are their names recorded? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How often are believers to rejoice? Is this hard or easy? Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How does peace come to a troubled believer? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the “all things” Paul is referring to, when he declares he can do this? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Which church was the most generous to Paul? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Which believers where Paul was living wanted to send a special greeting? \_\_\_\_\_