

PHILIPPIANS 3:17 - 4:23

3:17 - 4:1

Again, Paul contrasts the example that he, Timothy and Epaphroditus represent in opposition to other teachers and preachers who have their own ambitions and interests in mind. Moreover, he aligns the witness of Christ himself (2:5-11) to their own witness and he contrasts the consequences and rewards of having one's mind on earthly things over heavenly things. Jesus became one of us so that we could be transformed into his glorified likeness. He takes on our 'body of humiliation' (our corruptible mortality) in order that we can take on his glorified resurrection state of being (faith internalized shapes our becoming).

4: 2-9

1) Paul now lists a few names behind the conflicts within the Philippian congregation. Euodia and Syntyche were local leaders in the Philippian congregation who had also helped Paul in his missionary journeys. We're they friends of Lydia (Acts 16)? In any case, they are in conflict and this has affected the congregation as a whole. 'My loyal companion' is a reference to another associate with some leadership status in the congregation. Other coworkers may already be dead as Paul refers to their names being in 'the book of life.'

2) Paul challenges the Philippians to shine with the following attributes:

- They must learn to rejoice.
- They must learn to be gentle with each other.
- They must learn not to worry and how praying the right way can help.
- They must learn how to receive and nourish the peace of God in their hearts & minds.

Again, the contrast between Roman/worldly values and those of Christ are unmistakable. It is not the Roman peace that counts, or money and status that make cause for rejoicing. And it is not being decisive and demanding of one's own rights that makes for satisfaction, but rather, being gentle. And it is not taking charge and exercising control by force which relieves anxiety, but honest prayer to the only true and lasting source of peace - the God revealed in the humbling love of Christ.

3) Finally, Paul lists some of the classical Greek virtues (whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable) and challenges the Philippians to adopt them as lived out through Paul's (and others') witness, as well as their faith in Christ's model of compassion (the peace of God as expressed in Christ Jesus (4: 7,9, 2: 5-11)). Rather than just list moral rules, Paul lists qualities of attitude and character. Such qualities are what's needed to effectively engage any number of issues with a right spirit.

4: 10-23

Paul ends his letter as he began it: full of gratitude and joy for the relationship he has with the Philippians and their generosity and witness. It's amazing that Paul can point to their imperfections and still believe in them as wonderful examples of Christ's love.

Paul acknowledges their financial generosity and the care packages they have provided for him over the years. At the same time, Paul says 3 things more:

1) He has learned to say thank you without shame and without feeling obliged and dependent. In Roman culture, gifts given and received always had social strings attached in terms of reciprocal obligations. Paul's relationship with the Philippians is one of freedom in giving and receiving.

2) Paul has learned to live with little, finding his source of fullness at a spiritual level in terms of a satisfaction in a higher purpose governing his life with all its gains and sacrifices.

3) Whatever the Philippians have given, they have given as a response, perhaps even an inner obligation, connected to Paul's serving and giving to them.

But Paul says thank you by acknowledging that they have given over and above whatever they may have owed, and they will receive their reward, and a reward that counts - God's favour (grace) and blessing.

Paul ends the letter as he began it - on a high note. He also notes that he is not alone and isolated in a faraway Roman prison cell. Members of the emperor's household are also believers in Christ, and they as well as others, are part of the circle of Paul's spiritual family, meeting with him and visiting him. Isn't this amazing!