

October Teaching Theme: Philippians

讲员 Speaker: Pastor Tian & Dr. Moon

题目 Topic: 保罗的舍弃与追求/"Not Perfect but Pressing On"

经文 Scripture: Philippians 3

Monthly Theme: This month, we are going through a 4 part series on the letter to the Philippians. The church in Philippi was one of Paul's early Christian communities founded on his second missionary journey around 50 AD, which we read about in Acts 16. Philippi was a Roman colony known for its patriotic nationalism and was strategically populated by Emperor Octavian (Caesar Augustus) with retired military veterans, ensuring the region's allegiance to the Empire. In this context, Paul faced resistance preaching the Gospel - that Jesus is the true King of the whole world, not Caesar. As a result, the Christian community in this region continually faced persecution even after Paul left. Fast-forward 10-12 years, and Paul finds himself under Roman imprisonment for the proclamation of this Gospel. The church in Philippi sent Epaphroditus to help provide and care for Paul, and this letter is what Paul sent back with Epaphroditus to the church community. All of this context is crucial for us to understand the nuances of this letter. Contained within this short letter is a profound posture and mindset for the people of God to follow.

十月 **October:** 新約書信: 腓立比書 **New Testament Epistle: Philippians**

October 3rd - 腓立比書 1 Philippians 1

October 10th - 腓立比書 2 Philippians 2

October 17th - 腓立比書 3 Philippians 3

October 24th - 腓立比書 4 Philippians 4

October 31st – 諸聖節 All Saints Day (雲彩般的見證人 The Cloud of Witnesses – 希伯來書 Hebrews 11-12:3)

Resources:

[Sermon Video](#) (Pastor Tian)

[Sermon Slides](#) (Pastor Tian)

[Sermon Video](#) (Dr. Moon)

[Sermon Slides](#) (Dr. Moon)

[Bible Project: Philippians Overview](#) (English - 9:13)

[Bible Project: Philippians Overview](#) (Chinese - 8:44)

[If you have not yet watched the overview video, it is helpful to get the big picture]

Discussion Questions (Pastor William R. Horne/Pastor Peter Linghui Tian):

- (1) Read Philippians 3 together. What observations do you make, and what stands out to you? How would you summarize the chapter?
- (2) 保罗为什么要劝勉腓立比的信徒要防备犬类，防备作恶的，防备妄自行割的？这些人在当时指的是哪些人？Why did Paul exhort the believers in Philippi to guard against dogs, guard against evildoers, and guard against circumcision? Who were these people referring to at the time?

- (3) 保罗身上有哪些可夸的？认识主后，他舍弃了什么？他新的追求又是什么？这对今天我们跟随主有哪些启发？What can Paul boast about? After knowing the Lord, what did he give up? What is his new pursuit? What inspiration does this have for us to follow the Lord today?
- (4) Paul has many reasons to put confidence “in the flesh,” in both his born-privileges and his hard-earned accomplishments and status, but he considers them all loss for the sake of “knowing Christ.” What temptations to “put confidence in the flesh” do we face? How can we combat those temptations?
- (5) The “enemies of the cross” have their minds set on “the things of the earth,” while the people of the cross have their minds set on “our citizenship in heaven.” What does it look like to have our minds set on “heaven”? Give some practical examples of what a person with their “mindset on ‘heaven’” would do?
- (6) 为什么保罗要提醒腓立比的信徒“我们是天上的国民”？认识自己是天上的国民，对今天我们跟随主有哪些提醒和帮助？Why did Paul remind the believers in Philippi that “we are citizens of heaven”? Knowing that we are a citizen of heaven, what reminders and help do we have for following the Lord today?

Important Notes (Pastor William R. Horne):

Context of Philippians 3: Again, as always, recall the context of the letter found [above](#).

Paul commands us to “Watch Out” for adversaries (Christians formed by another story other than Jesus) with destructive beliefs and practices. Those who become “enemies of the cross” were not atheists but likely people who genuinely acknowledge God but were formed by another story. They have abandoned the pursuit of the heavenly prize in favor of what belongs only to the present scheme of things. If we are not attentive to the stories that form us, we will become “enemies of the cross” while thinking we are friends of Jesus.

When we anchor our journey of spiritual formation in the profound Gospel truth that our righteousness is found in Christ alone, our motivation and drive on the journey becomes to “know Christ” and “becoming like him in his death,” instead of trying “to earn our righteousness.” For Paul, this good news of King Jesus was so good that his whole life became defined by the pursuit to “know Christ.” If we grasp the true beauty of the Gospel message, we too will be compelled to do the same. To become like Jesus “in his death” is to take on the same posture as Jesus, willing to suffer (and even die) for the good of the other. This is a profound call that we can only do in submission to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Notes on Q2: Most scholars believe Paul is referring to a group called the “Judaizers,” who are believers who hold that Gentiles should become Jewish (following circumcision, dietary laws, purity laws) to participate fully as members of God’s people, the church (see Acts 15:1, 5). However, it was decided through the guidance of the Holy Spirit at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 that Gentile believers did not need to conform to Jewish cultural and religious customs to follow Jesus. This was a constant battle in the early church in most communities where this new multi-ethnic church had begun with both Jews and Gentiles together.

Recall also the context of the Imperial Cult (the strong patriotic nationalist setting) in Philippi. Likely, those Jewish Christ-believers, who were acting as “enemies of the cross” in their insisting Gentiles follow Jewish customs had some political protection and cover in the Jewish

synagogues, unlike the new Gentile Christ-followers. We must recognize that tensions would exist between the new believers and their pagan family and friends because they refused to participate in imperial cult worship and other pagan festivals. The temptation then to receive approval from leaders of the synagogue (Jews), where there was more protection, would be substantial.

Dr. Lynn Cohick has a helpful quote on the dynamic at work here. “[Paul] is not contrasting Christianity and Judaism here; rather, he is arguing with other believers about the proper way Gentiles are to live out their faith in Christ. To the opponents, a proper lifestyle for them includes the ethnic Jewish marker of circumcision. They maintain that the Messiah would want Gentile believers to be pure and clean, circumcised, and thus eat kosher food and rest on the Sabbath. Paul made his case against such understanding in almost all of his churches (Gal 2:12; Eph 2:11; Col 4:11; Titus 1:10). He is not arguing against opponents who say that Gentiles must earn their salvation; he is combating the view that holy, righteous living can happen outside of faith in Christ. The law is not the vehicle for knowing Christ; faith is. The Torah will not empower a person for holy living; the resurrection power is the only force capable of that.”

Notes on Q3&4: The Apostle Paul has made a clear case throughout the letter for not using one’s born-privileges and his hard-earned accomplishments and status for selfish gain, but the Christian must subversively leverage these things for the well-being of others. Paul’s example is significant for us today, where many refuse to acknowledge their layers of privilege, let alone leverage those privileges for the sake of others and the Kingdom of God. This is why the Christian community should be characterized by advocating and pursuing justice for others - particularly those marginalized in our society.

Paul here in Philippians 3, list out privileges he has:

- circumcised on the eighth day
- of the people of Israel
- of the tribe of Benjamin
- a Hebrew
- a Pharisee
- a zealous persecutor of the church
- a blameless doer of the law

“The first three are accidents of birth, while the last four mark out Paul’s choices in expressing his birthright.” (Cohick, L. H.) Paul chooses to use these social advantages and privileges not for his gain but for the “sake of Christ,” which we say in chapter 2 is the sake of others (“Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”)

Putting others before yourself is a call to use power and privilege for the good of others. We all have been given privileges (both earned and unearned) that we must first recognize and then use for the benefit of the other. For example, in our cultural context in the United States, I have many privileges and advantages as a male that I should leverage and use for the well-being of women. Similarly, we could look at privileges like ethnicity (depending on the social context), socio-economic status, educational opportunities, etc. This is worth our time and reflection over a good cup of coffee (or tea) of how we put on the “mindset of Christ” in our context.

Notes on Q5: We mustn't over-spiritualize our understanding of "heaven" and having our minds set on "heaven." If "heaven" is to be understood as the Kingdom of God that Jesus claimed was "here now" and will be fully here when he returns, our mindset on "heaven" must also carry the tensions of the present and future. Thus we look forward with an enduring hope that Jesus will return and make all things right while simultaneous in our prayers and actions creating space that look like "heaven on earth" (Recall the Lord's Prayer - "your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.")

The "enemies of the cross" are self-indulgent, unwilling to walk in the sufferings of Christ. The self-indulgence of these people expresses itself in their appetites, pride, and mind: their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. These people are the opposite of the way of Jesus found in chapter 2, but they are consumed with "selfish ambition" and "vain conceit" (or "empty glory").

Notes on Q6: Again, we see the idea of "citizenship" come up again in this letter. We must be shaped by a different King and different Kingdom, not the nation-states and empires of the world. As we will see a little bit in chapter 4, this calls us to a unique identity as "exiles." Yes, we are allegiant to King Jesus alone, and thus we reject the idol of nationalism, as the people of God are transnational. This, however, does not mean we can't love our culture, people, and country (at a healthy level) or that we should not "seek its welfare" (Jeremiah 29). The Christian must live by the ethics of the Kingdom of God while engaging the "good, honorable, and just" in the world & culture.

"Heaven" should not be read as the modern concept of "somewhere we go in the sky" but "heaven" as the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Look in verse 20, "we eagerly await a Savior *from there*..." fitting in with the idea of the Biblical narrative that Jesus is coming to us to establish the Kingdom of God ("The New Heaven & New Earth"). This should help shape how we understand being "citizens of Heaven."