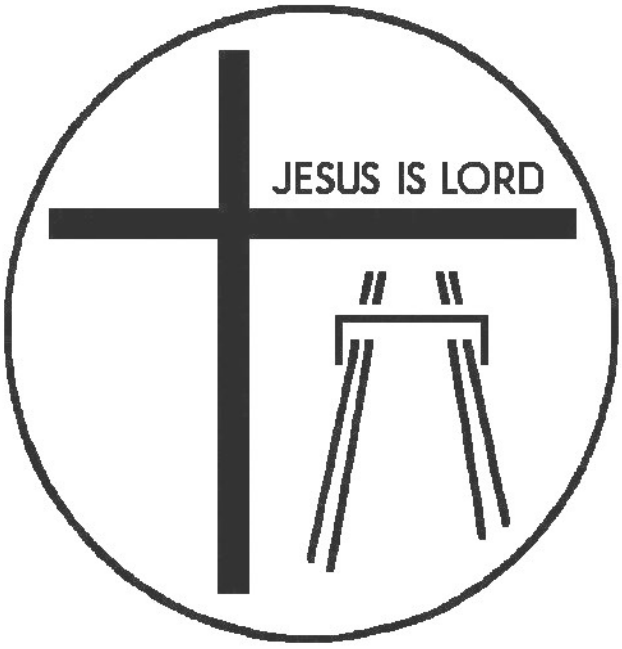
# PHILIPPIANS

## *~ A Journey Into New Life ~*

### *8 Studies for Home Groups on Paul's Letter to the Church in Philippi*



# Midrand Presbyterian Church

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Week 1

# A NEW HEART

Philippians 1: 3 – 11

A heart of confidence in the power of God: v 3-6

The church at Philippi was founded by an extraordinary display of God's power. It all began in AD 52 in utter frustration. Paul could not get into Asia or Bithynia. Every door seemed shut, but God opened up something much better. In a vision Paul saw a man saying: "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9).

On the Sabbath, Paul went down to the river where a group of women had gathered to pray. Here a wealthy merchant woman, Lydia, was converted (Acts 16:11-15). While staying in Philippi, Paul was followed around by a fortune-teller, who was under demonic influence as a result of her involvement in the occult. After a few days, Paul commanded the evil spirit to leave the girl (Acts 16:16-18). The owners of the girl became angry, seized Paul and Silas and then dragged them to the market-place to face the authorities (Acts 16:19-21). The magistrates bowed to public pressure and Paul and Silas were stripped, flogged and thrown into prison (Acts 16:22-24). With their feet in stocks, they prayed and sang hymns to God. Then an earthquake shook the prison and all the doors flew open. The jailer wanted to commit suicide, but Paul later lead this jailer and his family to Jesus Christ (Acts 16:25-40).

Paul saw the astonishing power of God behind the human agency of his words. It was God's power that started the church at

Philippi; therefore he had confidence that God would complete the work that He had begun. This is the confidence that we have as Christians: we have responded to God's call and He has begun a good work in us. Now the Holy Spirit lives in us and enables us to be more like Christ every day. His promise is that He will carry this good work on to completion. We need to retain this confidence even when life is difficult. Jesus promised his disciples eternal life, a quality of life that starts now and goes on forever. Jesus said: "No one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

<u>A heart of compassion for the people of God: v 7-8</u>
Paul was not a "softie" or a "doormat". He was capable of standing up to the Roman authorities when they had wronged him, but he also knew how to be tender. When Paul says "I have you in my heart" (v 7), he is expressing deep love for the people of Philippi. His love and affection was not based merely on past experiences, but also on the unity that comes when believers draw upon Christ's love. All Christians are part of God's family and thus share equally in the transforming power of His love. Let Christ's love motivate you to love fellow Christians and to express that love in your actions toward them.

Paul was a man of love and compassion. He had Jesus' heart and Jesus' love and this was the motivating force behind his ministry. It does not matter how doctrinally correct or gifted you are, without love you are nothing (1 Cor 13). We need to pray for the compassions of Christ to fill us.

<u>A heart of concern for the principles of growth: v 9-11</u>
Probably eleven or twelve years had passed since Paul's first visit to Philippi. The church had grown in numbers and maturity. It is not enough to simply increase in numbers – a healthy church will grow in maturity. Paul now prays for this growth to continue to develop.

First, he prays for growth in love (v 9). He is thinking of their love for God and their love for one another. The two are linked in the NT (read John 4:7-21).

Secondly, Paul's prayer is that their love was to be more than an emotional experience; it was to be rooted in knowledge. Presumably, this is knowledge of God and of each other. A healthy Christian needs to be growing in his or her knowledge of God. As we meet in small groups to deepen our knowledge of God, we also deepen our friendships with other Christians. Isolated growth is likely to be stunted, for we were meant to grow together.

Thirdly, Paul prayed for growth in holiness of life (v 10-11). He prays that they may be holy both inwardly and outwardly: pure motives, an inner purity and blameless, without giving offence, referring more to the outward way of life.

The "fruit of righteousness" (v 11) includes all the character traits flowing from a right relationship with God. There is no other way for us to gain this fruit of righteousness than through Christ. (read Gal 5:22-23 for "the Fruit of the Spirit).

In these opening verses of Philippians, we have an insight into Paul's heart.

We see his faith and his complete confidence in the power of God.
We see his love and compassion for the people of God.
We see hope in his concern for the principles of growth.
We see him looking forward to the "day of Christ".
Like Jesus, Paul's heart had confidence in the power of God.
Paul saw people as Jesus saw them – with the heart of God.
Paul longed for them to grow into the likeness of Jesus (v 11).

DISCUSSION: PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

A heart of confidence

1.

"…as so often happens, when circumstances seem against us, God opened up something much better". What experience have you had of this? Why do you think God works in this way?

2.

How does Paul know that it is God who "began a good work" in the lives of the Christians at Philippi?

3.

"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." What does this imply for your future?

A heart of compassion

4.

Why must love be the "motivating force behind….ministry"? What happens when it isn't? What experience have you had of this?

5.

Where does such love come from? How?

A heart of concern

6.

How can we assess the health of a church? How healthy is yours? Why?

In what ways could you make a positive contribution?

7.

In what way is Christian love to be "more than an emotional experience"?

How in practice can it be so for you?

8.

Is there anything about you that might be a “barrier to God’s blessing” – either in your life or in your church? What can you do about it?

CONSIDER how you might pray for these three aspects of what it means to have a “new heart”.

Week 2

# A NEW PURPOSE

## Philippians 1: 12-30

### Gospel Possibilities (v 12-14)

Word had spread about the reason for Paul's imprisonment (v 13). Being imprisoned would cause many people to become bitter or to give up, but Paul saw it as one more opportunity to spread the Good News of Christ. Paul realized that his current circumstances were not as important as what he did with them. Turning a bad situation into a good one, he reached out to the Roman soldiers who made up the palace guard and encouraged those Christians who were afraid of persecution. We may not be in prison, but we still have plenty of opportunities to be discouraged – times of indecision, financial burdens, family conflict, church conflict, or the loss of our jobs. How we act in such situations will reflect what we believe. Like Paul, look for ways to demonstrate your faith - even in bad situations. Whether or not the situation improves, your faith will grow stronger.

How did Paul end up in chains (v 13) in a Roman prison? While he was visiting Jerusalem, some Jews had him arrested for preaching the gospel, but he appealed to Caesar to hear his case (Acts 21:15 and 25:12). He was then escorted by soldiers to Rome, where he was placed under house arrest while awaiting trial – not a trial for breaking the law, but for preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ. At that time, the Romans did not consider this a serious charge. A few years later, however, Rome would take a different view of Christianity and make every effort to stamp it out of existence. Paul's house arrest did allow him some degree of freedom. He could have visitors, continue to preach and write

letters such as this one. A brief record of Paul's time in Rome is found in Acts 28:11-31. The "whole palace guard" refers to the Praetorian Guard, the elite troops housed in the emperor's palace.

Gospel Priorities (v 15-18)

Some who were preaching the gospel took advantage of Paul's imprisonment to advance their own cause. Their motives were envy, rivalry and selfish ambition (v 15-17). It matters a great deal that people hear the undistorted message of the gospel. Paul is not speaking about the message or the means in these verses, but about the motives of the preachers (v 18). Paul longs for us to have pure motives, but more important is the fact that "Christ" is preached.

Paul had an amazing selfless attitude. He knew that others were taking advantage of his imprisonment to preach the gospel for the wrong reasons; like building their own reputations, but regardless of the motives, he rejoiced because the gospel was preached.

Gospel Purpose for Living (v 19-16)

To those who do not believe in God, life on earth is all that there is and it is so natural for them to strive for the values of this world – money, popularity, power, prestige and pleasure. For Paul however, to live meant to develop eternal values and to tell others about Christ, who alone could help them see life from an eternal perspective. Paul's whole purpose in life was to speak out boldly for Christ and to become like him. Thus Paul could confidently say that dying would be even better than living, because in death he would be removed from worldly troubles and he would see Christ face to face. Make certain of your eternal destiny and then you will be ready to serve – devoting your life to what really counts, without fear of death. Paul had a purpose for living when he served the Philippians and others. We also need a purpose for living that goes beyond providing for our own physical needs. Whom can you serve or help? What is your purpose for living?__

Gospel Pattern for Life (v 27-30)

It is not enough to speak the gospel, we must also live it. Paul says “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (v 27). The word for “conduct” means “live as citizens”. Paul is using the image of citizenship which would have been familiar with his readers. Philippi was a Roman colony and the Philippians were Roman citizens. They were proud of their privileges which were those of Rome itself.

Paul uses this analogy. They would have wanted to live a life worthy of Rome. However, their true citizenship is now in heaven and their Christian colony on earth. They must live a life worthy of the city of heaven – a life of freedom, love and joy. Then others would say, “I want to be a citizen of that colony”. People are often drawn to Christianity because of the life of another Christian. This is not only an individual matter, but there is also a corporate aspect (v 27-30). Paul now turns from the image of citizens to the image of a unified military device – a core of highly disciplined, heavily armed infantry standing shoulder to shoulder, normally eight men deep.

This is a reflection of the unity which the gospel should bring to our relationships. We are united with a common faith in a hostile world. There will be opposition
(v 28), there will be suffering and struggling (v 29-30). But we need not be frightened (v 28); we are not in it alone. The enemy will seek to divide us, but we must resist him and provide a united front to the world. We must fight division and seek to “stand firm in one spirit” (v 27).

## DISCUSSION: PHILIPPIANS 1: 12-30

### New Purpose

1.
From what Paul says, what is it that enables him to make light of his sufferings to the point of rejoicing in them? To what extent do you share his perspective?

2.
Is there any way in which you "feel trapped" and unable to serve Christ as you would ideally like to? How do Paul's words help?

3.
In what ways do you "speak the word of God"? Is there scope for you to do so more courageously and fearlessly? How might this be possible?

4.
How do you react to people who appear to be preaching the gospel "for money or selfish ambition"? Would Paul agree with you?

5.
Why need Christians have no worries about death? Do you share Paul's outlook on this?

6.
What drives Paul? What drives you? How do you know?

7.
In what ways does the enemy "seek to divide" you from other Christians? What can you do to thwart his strategy?

Week 3

# A NEW ATTITUDE

Philippians 2 : 1-11

Paul was in prison, chained to a Roman soldier, guarded, unjustly accused, with no comforts and facing an early death. He had lost his freedom and was unable to do what he love doing most of all: preach the gospel. Yet he writes, “make my joy complete” (v 2). Only one thing would make him completely happy and what he asks for has nothing to do with his own needs – it is a concern for the people of Philippi. He appeals for spiritual unity among the Philippians.

1. He appeals for their unity in Christ (v 1). Christ is the chief ground for our unity.
2. He uses the argument of God’s love (v 1). If we have any experience of God’s love for us, we cannot fail to love our brothers and sisters who are equally loved by God.
3. He points to the unity that the Holy Spirit brings (v 1). The Holy Spirit unites us.
4. He appeals to Christian love (v 1). If we love people we will hate disunity.
5. He urges a unity of emotions (v 2 – “having the same love”). This means having the same attitude of love.
6. He urges a unity of wills (v 2 – “one in spirit and purpose”). His desire is that they have the same ultimate goal.

Wrong attitudes

The first wrong attitude is “selfish ambition” (v 3). The original word meant “rivalry”. When this attitude is allowed to develop and grow, disunity will be the result.

The second wrong attitude is self-importance, “vain deceit” (v 3). Prestige is for many people a bigger temptation than wealth. The opposite of such pride is the “humility” which Paul urges when he says, “consider others better than yourselves” (v 3). Being humble involves having a true perspective about ourselves (see Romans 12:3). It does not mean that we should put ourselves down. Before God, we are sinners, saved only by God’s grace, but we are saved and have great worth in God’s kingdom. We are to lay aside selfishness and treat others with respect and common courtesy. This links us with Christ, who was a true example of humility.

The third wrong attitude is self-centeredness: being concerned only with ourselves and our own interest (v 4). We are urged to look to the interests of others (v 4). This means an attitude of love in EVERYTHING. It is similar to Jesus’ command to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

<u>Right Attitudes (v 5-11)</u>

Jesus Christ was humble, willing to give up His rights in order to obey God and serve people. Like Christ, we should have a servant’s attitude, serving out of love for God and for others, not out of guilt or fear. This passage gives a glimpse into the mind of Jesus Christ. We see no selfish ambition, or self-importance, or self-centeredness. These words are probably from a hymn sung by the early Christian Church.

Firstly, Jesus let go of his “natural” status. Jesus was “in very nature God” (v 6). Yet He “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” (v 6). Thus, the opposite of selfish ambition.

Secondly, Jesus let go of His “social” status. He was equal with God (v 6). He was King of kings, Lord of lords, yet He “made himself nothing” (v 7). “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45).

Thirdly, He let go of His “legal” status. He gave up His right to life – “and became obedient to death – even death on a cross” (v 8). He gave His life as a “ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). HE BECAME LIKE US SO THAT WE MIGHT BECOME LIKE HIM. He died that we might have life.

Paul says that our attitude should be like that of Jesus. We are to give ourselves to humble service and unselfish love. Jesus taught that true greatness comes from service (Mark 10:43-44).

The first creed of the early Christian Church was “Jesus Christ is Lord” (v 11). “Lord” was the way in which God’s name in the Old Testament was translated in the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures. There is no rivalry in the Trinity. The lordship of Jesus Christ brings glory to God the Father (v 11).

This is the attitude that we are to have, we are to follow the example of Jesus Christ: to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, to serve others and to look to their interests.

DISCUSSION: Philippians 2 : 1-11

1.
What arguments does Paul use as the basis of his appeal for Christian unity?
2.
How does Philippians 2:2 help us to understand exactly what unity means?
3.
With whom should you be united in the way Paul describes? Are you?
4.
What wrong attitudes does Paul identify that are likely to undermine unity?
5.
How prevalent are wrong attitudes, both in society generally and in you own life?
6.
In what ways does “the mind of Christ” differ from what would be expected of humanity in general?
7.
How does Paul’s teaching on true greatness challenge you?

Week 4

# NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

Philippians 2: 12-18

In this section Paul urges the Christians at Philippi to take responsibility for their lives and to take a responsible attitude to the society around them. Many in our society do not take responsibility for their actions and prefer to blame others. This refusal to accept responsibility goes right back to the time when Adam sinned. He blamed Eve and she blamed the serpent. But, ultimately, we are all responsible for our own actions / lives.

Our responsibility for our own lives (v 12-13)
Paul links this section by the word "therefore". It is because Jesus has set an example of obedience in working out his responsibility that we are to follow that example and to "work out" our salvation (v 12).

"Salvation" is, perhaps the most important word in the New Testament. For those who find "salvation" a bit of meaningless religious jargon, and even an embarrassment, "freedom" is an excellent substitute. To be saved by Jesus Christ is to be set free. Jesus sets us free from our guilt, our addictions and our fear of death (and all other fears). He sets us free to know God, to love others and "to be our true selves, as God has made us and meant us to be".

Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. We all have free will and are therefore responsible for our actions. Christians enjoy an even greater freedom: "the glorious freedom of the children of

God" (Romans 8:21). With this greater freedom, comes greater responsibility.

We are told to "work out" our freedom. This is quite different from working "for" our freedom. It is not "an objective to be reached" or "a benefit to be merited" but rather a possession to be explored and enjoyed more fully. In particular we need to work out the path along which we are to walk, in response to God's call. Each person has a different calling / ministry. It is our responsibility to discover our gifts and to use them. We are to work out our freedom with "fear and trembling" (v 12). Such is the importance of this that we cannot take it lightly, or we risk offending God and wasting our lives. It is possible to have a saved soul and a wasted life.

There is a balance in Paul's wording in this sentence. We are to "work out" our salvation because it is God who "works in" us. Our new-found freedom is a gift from God and even in the working out of it we need His help. God's work in us includes our wills. He works in us "to will and to act according to his good purpose" (v 13). If our will is surrendered to His will, God will give us the desire to do whatever he is calling us to do. What He wants for our lives is good. Working out our salvation means fulfilling our potential as the whole person we were created to be.

<u>Our responsibility to society (v 14 – 16a)</u>
The New Testament does not speak so much about society's responsibility to us, but our responsibility to those around us. We live in a "crooked and depraved generation" (v 15). The word for "crooked" suggests that it is warped in its activities and the word for "depraved" suggests that it is distorted in its values.

In the midst of society that is warped and distorted due to its rebellion against God, Christians are called to live lives that are noticeably different from those around them. We are called to "do

everything without complaining or arguing" (v 14). The word for arguing refers to an "intellectual rebellion against God". The word for complaining refers to a moral rebellion against God. Both attitudes are the opposite of praise. Praise of God and of others should characterize the life of the Christian so that we "may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault" (v 15). The word for blameless means "living a life with which no one can find fault". The Christian must not only be pure, but the purity of his life must be seen by all.

The children of God are supposed to bear the family likeness of their Father. As we live like this, we will be in contrast to those around us. We will "shine like stars in the universe" (v 15). Our lifestyle should be a shining example to others, but our responsibility not only involves our lifestyle, but also our lips.

We have a responsibility to "hold out the word of life" (v 16) to a society that is desperately needing God. Many people are dissatisfied because they have never found the relationship with God for which they were created. The good news of Jesus not only tells of life, it also gives life to those who hear and respond in faith. It is our responsibility to share this message with those around us.

<u>Our responsibility to the church (v 16b – 18)</u>
Paul had a great concern to care for the Christians at Philippi - such should be our concern towards our church and our Christian friends. Paul uses two examples to illustrate this concern.

First he uses an illustration from the world of athletics. Paul saw his efforts on behalf of the Philippians in the same terms as the strict training programme for the athletes of Greece. Paul needed to be in peak condition spiritually if he did not want to waste his efforts. There is great disappointment in seeing our nurturing of

new Christians come to nothing as they fall away, but great joy in seeing them grow in their love and service for the Lord.

The second image that he uses is one of sacrifice. He speaks of being “poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith” (v 17). The background to this image is probably heathen sacrifice. Paul is writing to converted heathens and uses a picture with which they are familiar. The “drink offering” was the cup of wine poured out as a sacrifice to the gods accompanying a larger sacrifice. It was therefore a small thing which brought the major sacrifice to completion.

Paul regarded the faith and service of the Philippians as a sacrifice offered to God. The language he uses is priestly. In the New Testament every believer is a priest. The priesthood is no longer confined to a select group / tribe. All the Christians at Philippi are priests, and their faith and good deeds which spring from that faith, are the sacrifice. Such is his love and sense of responsibility, that Paul is willing to die.

Ministry is pouring out ourselves for others. We have the responsibility of working out what it means for us – for our lives, for our society and for other Christians.

DISCUSSION: Philippians 2 : 12-18

1.
What does the word “salvation” mean? Why might it qualify as “the most important word in the New Testament” ?

2.
What does Paul mean by telling his readers to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling”? Have you applied this to your own life? In what ways?

3.
How do you react to the responsibility of having “a saved soul and a wasted life”? How do you think Paul would advise someone who felt that this description applied to them?

4.
What is the very careful balance in Paul’s wording in Phil 2: 12-13? Why is this so important?

5.
What is “crooked and depraved” about modern society? In what ways is the situation different today from that in the past?

6.
In what ways should the lives of Christians be noticeably different from those around them? Have you met anyone whose attitude was noticeably different? Did you feel challenged? In what way?

7.
What does it mean to “hold out the word of life”? How do you go about doing this?

8.
How can we maintain ourselves in “peak condition spiritually”? Who suffers if we are not at our best for God?

9.
“Ministry is pouring ourselves out for others”. I what ways have

you experienced this?

10. How should we pray for those who feel weighed down and in need of recharging?

Week 5

# NEW FRIENDSHIPS

Philippians 2: 19-30

Today, friendship does not have the same high value that it once had long ago. Yet, friendship is at the heart of Christianity and it should be at the heart of church life.

Men and women were created to live in a relationship of friendship with God (Gen 3). The creation order involved not just friendship with God, but friendship with one another (Gen 2:18). Marriage was part of God's solution – but human friendship, vital also in marriage, was also a crucial part of his solution. It was the sin of Adam and Eve which broke down the friendship, not only with God, but also with each other (Gen 3:8).

On the cross Jesus destroyed the barrier between us and God and also the barrier between people. Restored friendship is part of Jesus' redemptive work. Jesus needed friends, both male and female. He described his chosen disciples as "friends" (John 15:14). Within that small group, He had a group of three special friends with whom He was very close. He demonstrated that marriage is not the only solution to "aloneness". Close friendship is another solution.

In Phil 2:19-30 we get a fascinating insight into two of Paul's friendships. Here are three ordinary Christians who show us a

model of an extraordinary relationship. We look at four marks of Christian friendship.

Genuine Love

Timothy came from Derbe or Lystra. His mother was a Jewess called Eunice (2 Tim 1+5). His grandmother was called Lois. His father was a Greek. Timothy had been brought up as a Greek and was therefore uncircumcised. He is referred to as Paul's "son" in the Lord and they were very close friends (1 Cor 4:17). Their friendship was like that of a father and a son. In Phil 2:20, Paul sees so much self-interest around, yet Timothy had a "genuine interest" in the welfare of the people of Philippi.

Paul chose as his friends, people who were different from the people around him. He loved Timothy who had a genuine interest in others. He also loved Epaphroditus, who was ill and showed a concern for his safety (v 25-28). He was a true friend to both Paul and the Philippians.

Here is the first mark of Christian friendship – it arises out of a genuine love for other people. Genuine love for others should not be confined to those who are already Christians. Friendship is the most effective way to pass on the gospel of Jesus Christ. We make friends because we are genuinely interested in others and because we are interested in others, we want to tell them about Jesus.

Common Interest

The second reason for their friendship was their common concern for the interests of Jesus Christ, which were quite unlike the interests of those around them (v 21). Ordinary friendships are made by people with interests in common, doing things together. Christian friendship is in a different league. Christians enjoy an unparalleled closeness called "fellowship" which results from trust, security and openness arising from a common focus on Jesus

Christ. Paul describes this closeness when he uses the word "brother".

Jesus accepted everyone, but he "chose" his friends. If Jesus needed a small group of friends, so do we. We need to talk to those whom we trust, to encourage and pray for one another. Christian friendships are enriching and rewarding.

Common Vision

Christian friendship arises out of a common vision and goal for our lives. Paul and Timothy served together "in the work of the gospel" (v 22). Epaphroditus was a "fellow-worker" (v 25). Working together for the gospel, brings us close to Christian friends. It is important to meet with other Christians to talk, be together and pray, but if that becomes an end in itself, it is self-defeating. We need to be involved together in "the work of the gospel" or groups become inward looking and eventually shrivel up and die. When we work together, friendships flourish and blossom.

Risks and Battles

Paul describes Epaphroditus as a "brother, fellow-worker and fellow-soldier" (v 25). The works imply: common sympathy, common work, common danger, toil and suffering. Epaphroditus had been prepared to risk his life for the sake of his friend Paul (v 30). He showed reckless courage on behalf of Paul, this is a mark of true friendship. Jesus referred to this type of friendship too (John 15:13).

All friendship involves taking risks. Jesus made himself vulnerable to his friends – He was totally open with them (John 15:15). Yet, He was betrayed by one of them deserted by others and disowned as an embarrassment. Friendship will always involve the risk of rejection, hurt and being let down.

We are not to seek friends for ourselves, but to be a friend to others. We are not to look to our own interests, but to those of Jesus and others. This is where true joy is to be found.

DISCUSSION : PHILIPPIANS 2 : 19-30

1.
How do you react to the claim that "friendship is at the heart of Christianity"? Is it at the heart of yours?

2.
Why is it that we desire and need close human friendships and yet find them so hard? What difference does Christianity make to this situation?

3.
What mark of Timothy's genuine friendship does Paul focus on in Phil 2:20? How does such an attitude come about?

4.
What is "by far the most effective way to pass on the good news of Jesus Christ" ? What experience have you had of this?

5.
Do you agree that Christian friendship is "in a different league" from ordinary friendship? What makes such friendships work?

6.
How can we prevent Christian friendships from becoming too inward looking? What can you do to put this into practice in your own context?

7.
In what practical ways can we help and be helped by one another?

8.
"All friendship involves taking risks". In what ways have you found this to be true?

Week 6

# NEW CONFIDENCE

Philippians 3 : 1-9

False Confidence

Paul warns the Philippian Christians against “the dogs” (v 2), a group of Jewish Christians who insisted that the new Christians be circumcised in order to be “real Christians”. They argued that faith in Jesus Christ was not enough. This group insisted on circumcision to make them acceptable to God. Paul insists that this is not necessary. Christians are already circumcised in their hearts (v 3) for they are set apart from God.

There is nothing that we can do to add to what Jesus has achieved for us on the cross. We must not place more emphasis on religious effort than on internal faith. God values the attitude of our hearts above all else. We will be rewarded for the work we do for God, but only if this is done in loving response to his free gift of salvation.

Paul then goes on to list several areas of his life that could give him confidence, but which in fact, only give a false confidence. Paul had impressive credentials – upbringing, nationality, family background, inheritance, orthodoxy, activity and morality (see 2 Cor 11 and Gal 1:13-24 for more about Paul’s credentials). However, his conversion (Acts 9) was based on God’s grace, not

his achievements. Salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.

True Confidence

All the things which had given him confidence in the past, Paul now regards as “loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus” (v 8). This is a profound relationship stemmed from a new righteousness (v 9). To be righteous before God means to be in a right relationship with God. This cannot be achieved on our own, but only received as a gift from God (v 9). Jesus made this possible by what he did on the cross (Rom 3:21-26).

The way to receive this righteousness is not by anything that we do, but “through faith in Christ”. He has access to the presence of God. The insight that God justifies us by faith is our objective ground of confidence before God and boldness before people. The person whose life is centered on Jesus Christ can go through life with a growing confidence.

DISCUSSION: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-9

False Confidence

1.

What exactly are the people described by Paul in Phil 3:2 doing? Why is Paul so angry about it? Can you think of any equivalents in the church today?

2.

"…..baptism on its own is not enough" Why? And if so, then what value does it have?

3.

In what do people try and put their confidence? What makes these things inadequate?

True confidence

4.

Where does Paul's new confidence come from? How has his attitude changed and what do you think are the causes of such a dramatic change?

5.

How is it possible for us "to be in a right relationship with God"? Is this something you have entered into? How did this happen?

6.

What is the great difference between false and true confidence?

Week 7

# NEW AMBITIONS

Philippians 3 : 10-21

Should a Christian be ambitious? Some people think that when you become a Christian, you should just drift through life taking whatever comes along as "God's will". By contrast, Paul was fiercely ambitious. Ambition has been defined as "the desire to succeed". Before he was a Christian, Paul had been fiercely ambitious in his desire to persecute the church. After his conversion, he did not lose his ambitious nature, but its direction had changed. He describes himself in this passage as an athlete desperate to win a race.

But what is his ambition? What is the driving force of his life? What ambition dominates and directs him? There are only two controlling ambitions – one is our own glory and the other, God's glory.

God's glory – Jesus-centered ambition

Paul's confidence came from knowing Christ and having his righteousness. His ambition is "to know Christ" (v 10). The Greek word for "to know" means far more than intellectual knowledge, but includes personal knowledge. Paul's ambition is not to just

know about Christ, but to know him as a person, to know him in an exhilarating and intimate way. This is the new focus of Paul's life. He goes to explain what he means by this relationship.

1. It means to know the "power of his resurrection" (v 10), not just as a past historical event, but as a dynamic power at work in his life. The Spirit of God brings this resurrection power to our lives. This power is available to all to enable us to live holy lives and to minister to other in the resurrection power. Paul's ambition is to know that power more and more.
2. "Knowing Christ" involves "the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death: (v 10). Our sufferings are the practical results of our Christian life. For some it will mean persecution, but for all of us it will include the struggle and pangs and afflictions undergone as we fight against sin within and without. It is in these moments that we experience "fellowship" with Christ.
3. It also means sharing his destiny (v 11). When Paul says "somehow" he is not expressing doubt, but humility. He is also not sure of when or where or how he will die. His future hope does not depend on himself, but on what Christ has done for him on the cross.

He is single-minded about his ambition – "one thing I do" (v 13). He does not encourage neglect of all other areas of life, but all else is subordinate to his overriding ambition to know Christ. Paul compares himself to an athlete – the Christian must "forget what is behind" (v 13). We cannot live on past successes, nor should we be burdened with past sins, bitterness, or wrongs.
This (v 14) is a picture of an athlete stretching out, straining every muscle, as he goes flat out for the finish line. Paul encourages the Christians a Philippi to follow this example (v 15-17).

<u>Man's glory – man-centered ambition</u>

Paul was a tough man, he had been tortured and imprisoned, but he did not cry tears of physical pain, instead he sang hymns of praise. Now in v 18 we read how he sheds tears of sadness about the "many who live as enemies of the cross of Christ". In rejecting the forgiveness and freedom that Jesus died to bring, they are rejecting him and his achievements on the cross. Paul sees that their destiny is destruction (v 19).

Who are these people?
Paul tells us three things about them which show that their ambitions were man-centered.

1. He tells us that "their god is their stomach" (v 19). Paul is referring to those whose god is personal satisfaction and whose lives revolve around sensuality. These things should not displace God and Jesus Christ as the centre of our lives.
2. Next we are told, "Their glory is in their shame" (v 19). They boast when they should blush, boast about ill-gotten gain, boast of sexual conquests or drunkenness.
3. Paul says, "Their mind is on earthly things" (v 19). Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21). If our ambitions are sensual, then our thoughts will be earthly.

In verse 20, Paul reminds the Christians once more about their citizenship in heaven. He reminds them that their bodies will wear out and that when they are raised, their bodies will be transformed to be like "his glorious body" which will never age, or decay, or be subjected to sinful desires.

In this passage, Paul tells us that everyone is on one of two paths. There are to destinations: one is heading for heaven, the other for destruction. There are two lifestyles; there are two attitudes to Jesus, two ambitions. In this passage we are faced with making

choices – Paul is in effect saying: "I have changed my ambitions. Now I am Jesus-centered. Will you join me?"

DISCUSSION: PHILIPPIANS 3:10-21

Jesus-centered Ambition

1.
Do you know Christ? What exactly does this mean?

2.
Have you noticed the Holy Spirit bringing "resurrection power" to you life? In what ways?

3.
What does it mean to be ambitious for Christ? Are you? Are there things that hold you back?

Man-centered Ambition

4.
What do Paul's tears in Philippians 3:18 tell us about him? What makes you weep? Why?

5.
"Many people's lives revolve directly or indirectly around satisfying their bodily desires" Do you think this is true? What does Paul identify as the inevitable result of this attitude to life? Why?

6.
"In this passage Paul tells us that everyone is on one of two paths". How do you respond to this?

Week 8

# NEW RESOURCES

Philippians 4 : 1-9

Paul encourages the believers in Philippi to “stand firm in the Lord” (v 1). In this passage, Paul tells them how not only to hold off the enemy, but how to be victorious, full of joy, with peace and a sense of the presence of God. He loves these people – they are his crown and joy – this carries the idea of victory and merriment.

Watch your relationships with other Christians (v 2-3)
Paul did not warn the church at Philippi about doctrinal errors, but he did address relational problems. These two women had been workers for Christ in the church. Their broken relationship was cause for great concern, as many had come to be believers because of the work of these women. Paul does not take sides, rather he urges them to be reconciled and he appeals to others to bring them together again. Paul does not criticize them; rather he concentrates on their good points in order to build them up. Paul is aware that even small trivial personality clashes can lead people away from the Lord.

We need to watch our relationships with other Christians carefully, because disunity, disagreements and un-forgiveness can weaken the church and destroy the faith. The warmth of Christian fellowship strengthens the Church, builds faith and is one of the vital secrets of standing firm in the Lord.

Watch your relationship with the Lord (v 4-7)

The key to standing firm in the Lord is our relationship with Him. How can we ensure that we stay close to Him?

(a) Enjoy the Lord (v 4)

Paul urges the Philippians to rejoice - 16 times in this letter – twice in verse 4. However bad our outward circumstances may be, there is always one thing that we can rejoice about: the Lord, his love, his mercy, his presence and his promises. However good our circumstances are, our chief reason for rejoicing should be the Lord.

(b) Expect the Lord (v 5)

"The Lord is near" – this is a good reason to be "gentle". The word for "gentleness" means reasonable, fair-minded, moderation, graciousness, charitable. It means being willing to forgo retaliation because the Lord is near. Firstly, the Lord is near in time, we can expect Him at any moment. Secondly, the Lord is near in the sense that he is already present by His Spirit.

(c) Entreat the Lord (v 6-7)

Prayer and worry are not easy bedfellows. "Why pray when you can worry and take tranquilizers?" Paul says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus". The extraordinary and wonderful promise is that as we do this, the "peace of God … will guard your

hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus". This has proved true in Christian experience. As we bring our worries to Him, leave them with Him, He gives us peace in exchange. This "peace" means "wholeness, soundness, well-being, oneness with God, every kind of blessing and good"' it surpasses all our expectations and hopes.

The peace of God keeps us close to the Lord. The peace of God protects us from the attacks which lead us away from the Lord and it keeps us united with Him in heart and mind.

Watch your unseen thoughts (v 8)

What we think is more important than whom we are and what we have – a man is not what he thinks he is, but what he thinks, he is. Jesus said something similar in Matt 15:19-20. What we think will affect every area of our lives. Paul urges us to set our minds on the right things. Do you have trouble with impure thoughts? Examine what you are putting into your mind through television, books, conversations, movies and magazines. Replace harmful input with wholesome material, read God's Word and pray. Ask God to help you focus your mind on what is good and pure.

Watch the lives of other Christians (v 9)

Paul is not ashamed to put himself forward as an example of a life to be followed. Paul encourages the believers to not only follow his teaching, but also his lifestyle. The writer to the Hebrews puts before his readers the example of great men and women of God (Heb 11), but he goes on to urge his readers to fix their eyes on Jesus (Heb 12:2). It is not wrong to model our lives on the life of another Christian, so long as the said Christian is modeling his life on Jesus.

The hardest part in all this is putting it "into practice". We must practice avoiding quarrels and staying united with other Christians. We must practice avoiding worry and anxiety by bringing our problems and concerns to God in prayer. We must

practice thinking on good and pure things. Then we can be confident that we will "stand firm in the Lord" and be in a close relationship with Him.

Exposure to God's Word is not enough - it must lead to obedience!

DISCUSSION: PHILIPPIANS 4:1-9

1.
Why is unity within the Church so important?
What experience have you had of the consequences of divisions and splits?

2.
In the light of what Paul says about Euodia and Syntiche, what do you think should be done when personality clashes occur?

3.
How can we ensure that the Lord really is our "chief ground for rejoicing"?

4.
What makes the fact that the Lord is near a "reason for forbearance"? Are you aware of any situations where this is specifically relevant for you at the moment?

5.
"Prayer and worry are not easy bedfellows". Why not?
What practical tips about prayer does Paul give? (v 6-7)

6.
What experiences have you had of "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding" which Paul speaks of in Philippians 4: 7?

7.
"What we think is more important than who we are and what we have". Why?

(Phil 4:8 and Matt 15:19-20)

8.

Given the climate of the modern world, how can we put Philippians 4:8 into practice? Try and be specific.

9.

How would you feel if others modeled themselves on your example?

10.

How should we choose our role models