

Lessons from Philippians

Philippians 1–4

© Mike Riccardi
TheGraceLifePulpit.com

Introduction

Last week, we reached a milestone here in GraceLife, as we concluded our exposition of Paul’s marvelous letter to the Philippians. It has been an immense privilege for me over this past year and nine months to dig deeply into this rich portion of Scripture, and to draw out of its treasures the message that I believe the Holy Spirit intended when He inspired it.

We’ve learned about the nature and implications of the Gospel, the nature of the Christian life, about treasuring Christ above all else and seeking our joy only in Him. We’ve learned about the character of true fellowship between believers, principles for enduring suffering well and standing firm in the Gospel against the pressures of an increasingly hostile society. We’ve learned about the Christian’s philosophy of both life and death, and we’ve observed numerous examples of the kind of sacrificial giving of ourselves that true life in Christian community demands from us. In a day where there has been great confusion in the larger evangelical world about the doctrine of sanctification, we have learned much about what sanctification is, our role and God’s role in it, and how we are to go about pursuing holiness in a way that Scripture commands. We’ve learned how to fight for unity with one another, for joy and contentment in Christ, for gentleness exhibited to all people, and for peace of heart and mind in the midst of a world full of anxiety.

And I trust that you share my sentiments that the lessons that the Lord has taught us through our study of His Word in Philippians have been absolutely precious treasures of instruction—that they have been valuable to you as you press on to greater pursuits of Christ and Christlikeness in your daily life.

But I recognize that a year and nine months is a lot of time, and especially because of the way Phil and I trade off with the teaching schedule—the fact that we’re only in Philippians twice a month at most—I recognize that the slower pace presents a challenge to keep our arms around the various lessons that we’ve learned as we’ve studied this book. We forget things, and I understand that. Now, there have been some of you who have been so kind as to suggest that I go ahead and start Philippians all over again! Now that they have seen the exposition of the parts, they’ve got a much better grasp of the whole—so much so that they’d like to see the whole book unpacked now that they know the end from the beginning.

And even though that's tempting for me, I'm not going to start over in Philippians. But what I *would* like to do is to take one last message and offer a brief review of some of the most important lessons that we've learned in our extended study of this book. Rather than immediately starting something new—and especially with our taking a break from the normal fellowship group schedule in the month of July—I want to punctuate our exposition of Philippians by surveying a number of topics that I want to make sure you take away from our study of this great epistle.

So that will be our aim of our message this morning. Though we have many to choose from, in our time together this morning, we're going to review **four key lessons** that the Book of Philippians teaches us—**four take-away points** that sort of summarize and encapsulate the great themes of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

I. The Nature of the True Christian

And the **first** of those key take-away lessons that Philippians teaches us is **the nature of the true Christian**. Philippians teaches us some foundational truths about what it really means to be a follower of Christ.

And this kind of lesson is always needed, because throughout the history of the church there have always been people who have professed to be true followers of Jesus Christ, but who, at the end of their lives, discover that they had been deceived all along. Jesus spoke about this very reality in His very first public sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7:21, He says plainly, "*Not everyone* who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." In fact, there will be *many* on the last day who will appeal to Him and say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then in verse 23 He utters those most terrifying words: "And I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

You see the danger of self-deception about one's own spiritual condition is a very real danger. And so it's always necessary for those who would call themselves Christians to be examining ourselves in the light of Scripture, paying attention to what Scripture says a Christian *is*, and asking ourselves if we, by the grace of God, meet that description. And the Book of Philippians has given us instruction on this issue in two main ways.

A. Trusting in Christ Alone for Righteousness

First, Philippians teaches us that the true Christian **trusts in Christ alone for righteousness**. Philippians chapter 3 is one of the richest texts in the New Testament on the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In the first half of that chapter, Paul is concerned to safeguard the

Philippians from the legalism of the Judaizers. And he does so by detailing a bit of his spiritual autobiography. He says, in chapter 3 verse 3, that the true Christian is one who, “worships by the Spirit of God, glories in Christ Jesus, and puts *no* confidence in the flesh.”

And then in verses 4 through 6, he reminds the Philippians that if acceptance with God came through confidence in one’s own inherent righteousness, that he would have everyone beat. He was circumcised on the eighth day, and so had performed the proper religious rituals. He was of the nation of Israel, and so he had the proper heritage. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, and so had the proper social status. He was a Hebrew *of* Hebrews, which means he fervently maintained his religious traditions. He was a Pharisee, a member of the strictest sect of Judaism, and so had the proper religious devotion. He went so far as to persecute Christians, and so he had the proper sincerity. And as to the righteousness that was in the Law, he was found blameless, and so he had the proper self-righteousness.

But in verse 7 he says, “But whatever things were gains to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” Everything that he trusted in to earn his acceptance with God was absolutely worthless to achieve salvation. All it could ever get him, he says in verse 9, is “a righteousness of [his] own derived from the Law.” But he knew that the only kind of righteousness that God accepts is the righteousness that comes *from* God Himself, which comes only by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

That is what it means to be a Christian, friends. A true Christian **trusts in Christ alone for righteousness**. You see, “believing in Jesus” is not just a confession you make with your lips, or a mental assent to certain facts of history. Believing in Jesus means putting no confidence in the flesh; it means abandoning all trust and reliance upon yourself for your righteousness—even in part!—and wholly leaning—entirely depending upon—an alien, external righteousness to take you to Heaven: the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

You see, if your righteousness depends on your doing anything as the ground of your acceptance with God, it is a righteousness “of your own derived from law.” It is not the alien righteousness of God, which is the only righteousness that saves. If any part of justification is our doing—if we contribute to the *basis* of our righteousness in any way, whether by baptism, by participating in the Lord’s table, by attending church, by reading our Bible, by praying, by doing good deeds—then grace is no longer grace, there is no Gospel, and we are all damned in our sins. God’s holiness is so magnificently perfect, His standard is so high, and our depravity is so pervasive, that all of our righteousness must be a free gift of His sovereign grace, because we could never earn it.

But the Good News of the Gospel is that the Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished the righteousness that we could not accomplish, and that by the utter free and sovereign grace of

God, any of you can have your sins paid for by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and can have Christ's righteousness count for you through faith alone. That's what it means to be a Christian. Instead of trusting in ourselves and our privileges and our accomplishments and our achievements, we abandon all confidence in ourselves and we trust *Jesus* for righteousness; we rely upon *Him* for access to God; we depend upon *Him* for the provision of everything that is required for entrance into the presence of absolute holiness. The true Christian **trusts in Christ alone for righteousness**.

B. Worshiping Christ Alone as Treasure

But there's a second characteristic of the true Christian that Philippians teaches us. And this is a characteristic that is so often overlooked, and I pray it would never be overlooked by anyone in GraceLife after our series in Philippians. Not only does the true Christian trust in Christ alone for righteousness, but he also **worships Christ alone as treasure**.

You see, the nature of man's sin problem is two-fold. First, man's sin brings a *judicial* separation between God and man. When we sinned in Adam, we were reckoned to have broken God's law, and are therefore devoid of the *legal* righteousness to stand before God. And so we need to repent from our "good works" and trust in Christ for that legal, judicial, forensic righteousness by which we can be accepted with Him. But sin also brought a *relational* separation between God and man. The essence of all our sin is idolatry—it is worshiping some other created thing in God's place—it is deriving satisfaction and seeking pleasure from something other than God Himself. And so we also need to repent from our idolatry and worship God in Christ alone as our treasure.

This is why Paul says in Philippians 3:8, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ." He will do whatever it takes to gain Christ—this Jesus whom he esteems to be of surpassing value, of incomparable worth, of matchless worth. If you were to put the value of knowing Christ on a balance scale, and put everything else that Paul has spoken about in Philippians 3 on the other side—the self-righteousness, the religious prestige, the financial security, the comfortable life, the highly-regarded profession—all of that, in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6)—all of it is just garbage. And so *along with* repudiating all confidence in himself to provide his legal righteousness, Paul also repudiates all the pleasures of the world—he regards them as refuse—so that—in order that, with the purpose that—he may gain Christ. He won't gain Christ, without receiving Him as **treasure**—without glorying in His surpassing value.

That's why the Lord Jesus, in Matthew 13:44, likens conversion to a man finding a treasure hidden in a field, and from the joy he has in that treasure, goes and sells everything he has and

buys the field so he can have that treasure. He counts everything he owns as refuse in comparison to the surpassing value of gaining this treasure! You see, true, saving faith receives Christ not only as *righteousness*; saving faith also receives Christ as **treasure**! *He* is the treasure hidden in the field! *He* is the pearl of great price! And Jesus and Paul are teaching that conversion is coming to love and value and esteem the worthiness of that great treasure! And if there is an idol in your heart that you refuse to give up worshiping in order that you may gain Christ, then you haven't truly come to know Him at all.

Paul puts legs on this reality in Philippians 1:19 to 21—what some have called the very heart of this letter. Paul is sitting in a Roman prison, awaiting his trial before Nero which could very well ensure his execution, and yet Paul says he is rejoicing. And when you go through the layers of argument in verses 19 to 21 as we did in our exposition of that text—when you strip away every outer layer of Paul's joy, digging deeper and deeper until the shovel finally hits something solid—what undergirds all of Paul's affections is that “Christ will even now, as always, be *exalted*—be *magnified*—in my body, whether by life or by death.” Whether he lives or whether he dies, Paul's joy remains constant, because the passion of his life is that Christ would be magnified—that His glory would be put on display to be as lovely and worthy and satisfying as it is!

And the reason he can be so confident that Christ will be magnified—whether he lives or dies—is because, verse 21, “To me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” And in our exposition of that marvelous sentence, we discovered that “To die is gain” means that when we are faced with the loss of all that death can take from us, we are so satisfied in Christ that we can call all that loss *gain*, because we know that it will mean that we will be with Jesus. And in the same way, “To live is Christ” means that when we are faced with all the wonderful things that this life can offer, we are so satisfied in Christ such that we hold all of it so loosely—it has no hold on our affections—we count it as garbage so that we can gain the surpassing value of knowing Christ. The true Christian magnifies the supreme worth of Jesus when he **worships Christ alone as treasure**—when he is more satisfied by Christ than by all that life can offer and all that death can take.

This is what Philippians teaches us about **the nature of the true Christian**. The true Christian trusts in Christ alone for righteousness, and worships Christ alone as treasure. GraceLife, is this you? Before we move on to anything else, we've got to get this right. Is this you? Is all of your hope for acceptance with God based entirely on the merit of Christ alone? Or are you still desiring to take some of the credit? Even a small part? Even 1%? And have your eyes been opened to treasure the worth of Christ above all rival pleasures? Or are you still harboring idols in your heart? Oh, if there is anyone here this morning who is a stranger to the grace of God in Christ, I plead with you to trust Him and treasure Him this morning.

II. The Gospel-Driven Life

A **second lesson** that the Book of Philippians teaches us is that **the Christian life must be driven by the Gospel**. And here we come to familiar territory.

From the very beginning of our exposition of this letter, I've said that the major theme of the Book of Philippians is the Gospel. It's not quite a presentation of the *content* of the Gospel, like the Book of Romans is. And it's not really a full-blown *defense* of the Gospel in the face of heresy, like the letter to the Galatians is. Philippians is about the *implications* of the Gospel—what sort of practical effect the realities and truths of the Gospel should have on the lives of believers. And I've come to that conclusion—not only because Paul uses the word “Gospel” more frequently in Philippians than in any other of his letters—but chiefly because at the point where Paul turns from discussing his own personal situation and begins to address the Philippians themselves, the very first imperative in the entire letter appears in chapter 1 verse 27. Paul says, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” And then every other command in the letter falls under the rubric of living in a manner consistent with their position in Christ.

So Paul's chief desire in writing this epistle is that the people of God would be living in a manner that is consistent with the implications of what Jesus Christ has accomplished on our behalf—that every facet of our lives would be shaped and driven by the Gospel that we have come to trust and treasure.

And that is a lesson that we need to take with us as we leave this epistle. Everything we do in our lives—everything we think, everything we feel, everything we say—all must be thought, felt, said, and done in light of the Gospel. There needs to be a straight line drawn from the Gospel of Jesus Christ to *every* aspect and facet of your lives. As Paul discusses the reality of the believer's union with Christ in Romans 6, he commands us in Romans 6:11: “Even so, consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” And if you put that together with the command to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel, it means that that *consideration* of ourselves as justified sinners must be something we do moment by moment.

If you know the depth of your sin, and the horror of your own helplessness to save yourself from the punishment that that sin deserves; and if you know the sweetness of forgiveness, purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ, ministered to your own soul by the Holy Spirit of God, owing to nothing at all in yourself; if you have been united to Christ by faith and counted righteous by God Himself—well then, you must order your life in such a way that is consistent with such a Gospel! In every situation that the providence of God brings your way, consider how to conduct yourselves in such a way that brings your *practice* in line with your *position* in Christ.

When I first preached on chapter 1 verse 27, I went through twelve different aspects of our Christian walk to try to demonstrate how it is that we are to bring the Gospel to bear on every facet of our lives. I spoke about how the Gospel drives our love for God, our love for our fellow Christians, our pursuit of unity, humility, and joy; our purity of speech and of sexual conduct, our understanding of marriage and parenting, how we pursue integrity in the workplace, and how we fight to be faithful in evangelism. And if any of you are interested in hearing those topics expounded, I direct you to download a copy of that message on Philippians 1:27.

But in order to give you some practical examples of what I'm talking about *now*, I want to discuss how the Gospel shapes our pursuit of the four main virtues that Paul speaks of in the letter. Paul has commanded the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel. And for them, the principal implications of Gospel-driven living involved four virtues: steadfastness, unity, humility, and joy. And follow this progression, here, because it's bubbling over with Holy Spirit-inspired wisdom.

The way that a Gospel-driven life will manifest itself in the particular context in which the Philippians find themselves is, first, by their standing firm in the face of opposition and continuing to be an effective witness for the Gospel amidst hostility. We see that in the second half of verse 27: "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are *standing firm in one spirit*."

But that steadfastness and effective witness will not be achieved without unity. The strength of an army is the unity of its soldiers. In order to successfully withstand opposition and strive against it, the company of soldiers must—in the language of verse 27—strive *together*, with *one* spirit and with *one* mind. And so Paul says in the opening verses of chapter 2: "If there's any encouragement in Christ, if there's any consolation of love, if there's any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind."

And then we learn that that unity will not be achieved without humility. Humility is the key to Christian unity. Disunity festers only so long as it's fed by selfishness, pride, and arrogance. But when the members of a congregation have a proper view of themselves in the light of God's holiness, all sense of entitlement—the sense that it is owed to us to be treated in a certain way—vanishes. Disunity simply cannot survive in a congregation that is permeated by the kind of self-forgetful humility that seeks its own happiness in the happiness of others. And so he commands us in chapter 2 verse 3 to "do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." And then he gives us the supreme example of that kind of self-sacrificing humility in verses 5 to 11: the humility-driven Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the only way that I could possibly be content to do nothing for the sake of my own glory and my own recognition is if my joy is not in my own glory, but in the glory of that humble Savior. And so Paul tells us multiple times in the letter to, “Rejoice in the Lord” (cf. 3:1; 4:4)

So: how do we pursue steadfastness, unity, humility, and joy by bringing the Gospel to bear on our lives? Well, in the case of our need to stand firm in the face of opposition—in situations in which we’re tempted to compromise on our convictions or fold under pressure, we need to remember that we are not our own—that we have been redeemed—bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20). We have been laid hold of by Christ—not to shrink back to destruction (Heb 10:39), not to be ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1:16)—but to make much of Jesus Christ and to spread His glory throughout the world. And if we lose every comfort that this life can offer in the process, then to live is Christ! And even if we should face death itself because of our loyalty to Christ, then to die is gain!

And in the case of unity: We need to consider that if believing the Gospel unites us to Christ such that we are one with Him, this means that we are also united to everyone else who is united to Him. And so if you find yourself in personal conflict with another Christian, you can eagerly and humbly seek to resolve that division by first remembering that you and that brother or sister are already united by the objective work of Christ! The Gospel teaches you that, whatever the cost to yourself, you must be diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3).

And as we said, that kind of unity will be achieved only as we grow in humility. And there is no attitude more consistent with the Gospel of sovereign grace than humility. We need to remember that we have been chosen by God for salvation based upon nothing at all in ourselves. If we are saved by a Gospel that we can do nothing to earn, it means that in everything we experience we are getting better than we deserve. And so if unity requires that we sacrifice our own rights and desires, remembering the Gospel will make us a humble people, ready for the pursuit of that unity.

And then joy. How could we be saved by such a glorious Gospel—the glad tidings of good things (Rom 10:15)—and not be *the* most joyful people on the planet? By the work of the Gospel, we are given new eyes and new hearts to find our joy in the magnification of Christ. And His glory is always there for us to behold in His Word, in prayer, in fellowship with the saints, in His creation, and in ten thousand other places if we have eyes to see. The Gospel is the greatest motivation in the world for us to “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil 4:4).

And so that little sampling is meant to be a model for how you are to bring the Gospel to bear on every aspect of your Christian living. If you leave this study of the Book of Philippians with

anything—whatever else you do!—only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

III. The Christian Life is a Life of Joyful Self-Sacrifice

There's a **third lesson** that we want to take away as we conclude our study on the Book of Philippians. This letter teaches us, number three, that **the Christian life is a life of joyful self-sacrifice**.

In chapter 1 verses 23 to 26, as Paul is speaking about his sanctified dilemma—whether he should set his affections upon dying and going to be with Christ, or continuing on in this life, he comes to the conclusion that it's the Lord's will for him to survive. He doesn't have any direct revelation from God about this, but he's confident that this seems to be the Lord's plan.

However, I want to remind you about the way that Paul thought about his life. What was his alternative to departing and being with Christ? A relaxing retirement? Basking in the sea breeze as he cruised the Mediterranean? Did it mean that he would get bogged down in the routines of life, and flood his life with so many worldly pursuits that he never had time to serve the body of Christ? No! A thousand times no! Look with me at chapter 1 verse 25. He says, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all *for your progress and joy in the faith*." Life, for Paul, meant *ministry*! You see, when Paul says, "For me to live is Christ!" he's not just talking a big game. He's not just ascending to heights of super-spiritual rhetoric! What it means, practically, for someone for whom to live is Christ—for someone who is more satisfied by Christ than all this life can offer—is **sacrificial service** for the benefit of Christ's *people*!

He wrote in Colossians 1:28: "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I *labor, striving* according to His power, which mightily works within me." In 2 Timothy 2 verses 9 and 10, he speaks of his suffering hardship for Christ even to the point of being imprisoned like a criminal. And then he says that he endures *all* things for the sake of the elect, that they may obtain salvation. And In Galatians 4:19 he compared his travail on behalf of the church's spiritual progress to a mother's labor pains. He says, "I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" Friends, this is the picture of one for whom to live is Christ. It is the *laying down* of your life in order to aid in the progressive sanctification of God's people!

You remember that in Philippians 2, verses 17 to 30, Paul presents to us a series of Gospel-driven ministers who we can look to as examples of Christian service. In verses 17 and 18, Paul puts himself forward as an example, where he compares his entire life to the ministry of an Old Testament priest endeavoring to offer a holy sacrifice to God. And he says the sacrifice he's

preparing to offer is the Christlikeness of the Gentiles themselves. And as he's facing the possibility of his death, he compares his martyrdom to the drink offering that seals and sanctifies the offering of the saints' holy living. He's saying, "Even if my ministry ends in my death, my life could not have been better spent—it could not be better sacrificed—than in the cause of your progress and joy in the faith!"

And then we have the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus. When a need arises in the Philippian congregation, Paul sees Timothy and says, "Timothy isn't merely seeking his own interests; he's seeking the interests of Christ. His genuine concern for you as Christ's people manifests itself in a continual readiness for service." And Epaphroditus—well, Epaphroditus just traveled 700 miles over 40 days *on foot* on behalf of the church at Philippi. And somewhere along the way on that herculean trip, he became ill. Paul says, "He was sick to the point of death," chapter 2 verse 27. But he didn't abandon his mission. He didn't turn around and head back to Philippi. He didn't even stop for rest and recovery. He pushed forward with a kind of holy recklessness that was willing to lay down his life for the cause of the Gospel.

And dear friends, we need to learn from these examples! As we leave our study of Philippians, I want each and every one of you to take with you something of this Spirit that animated the lives and ministry of Paul, of Timothy, and Epaphroditus! We cannot just play church—just get dressed up on Sunday morning, smile and greet one another politely, figure out one way to serve the church and call that our 'ministry,' and then just retreat to our own separate lives throughout the week! We need to be asking ourselves, day by day, how we can pour out our very life's blood upon the sacrifice and service of the faith of our brothers and sisters in Grace Community Church. How can I give myself for the progress and joy in the faith of my fellow believers? What can I do to stir up my Christian friends to love and good deeds? How can I serve them?

I've said this before but I'll say it again: there are real needs at Grace Church, my friends! There are real needs even within GraceLife! There are people sitting next to you who are hurting financially. There are people who would love to come to a Bible study or even to GraceLife on Sunday mornings, but who need rides. There are people who are moving who need help packing and loading. And ten thousand other practical needs that all of us, working together as brothers and sisters in Christ, can meet!

There are people who are battling with sin—people who are struggling in their walk with the Lord and who need encouragement and fellowship and accountability. There are people who need to know that there are faithful brothers and sisters praying for them, interceding on their behalf before the throne of grace. You see, we need to be in each other's lives!

I know it can get messy! I know that there are unique challenges when one sinner really opens up to and lives life with other sinners. I know that giving people a ride to church is going to mean

that you have to get up earlier on an already-early Sunday morning and go out of your way and get out of your comfort zone. But if we're conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel—if we're following the examples of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus as Gospel-driven servants and ministers—we need to die to our comforts and to our selfishness and to our daily and weekly routines, and pour our lives out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of the faith of our fellow Christians! GraceLife, we *must* leave our study of Philippians with the attitude of the Apostle Paul—that your life could not be better spent—each day of your life could not be better sacrificed—than in the cause of serving Christ's sheep and laboring for their holiness, which abounds to the glory of God!

And all of that sacrificial service—modeled for us in those three Gospel-driven ministers—is ultimately grounded in the example of Christ Himself, who laid aside *His* privileges—who laid aside His right to be worshiped by *all* creation, who laid aside His perfect fellowship with the Father, and submitted Himself to all the weakness of life as a human being in a sin-cursed world—in order to save *you*. Surely what it means to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of that Gospel is to joyfully give of your time, energy, and resources to be a faithful servant to your brothers and sisters. Oh, if Philippians teaches us anything, friends, it teaches us that **the Christian life is a life of joyful self-sacrifice.**

IV. The Christian is to Be Dominated by Christ

Well so far we've seen that Philippians teaches us about the nature of the true Christian—that the true Christian trusts in Christ alone for righteousness, and worships Christ alone as treasure. We've seen, secondly, that the Christian life must be driven by the Gospel. And just now, we've observed how Philippians teaches us that the Christian life is a life of joyful self-sacrifice.

Well that brings us to the final **lesson** that we'll consider this morning—though there are numerous other lessons that we could spend time recapping. But the **fourth lesson** that we need to take away as we leave our study of Philippians is this: **the Christian is to be dominated by Christ.**

And this is not exactly a lesson that we've stopped to comment on at any particular time throughout our exposition. It's a bit of a new thought to our study. And that's because this principle has never really been the point of any one particular passage. But as we consider the letter as a whole, we see plainly that Paul's absolute preoccupation with the Lord Jesus Christ permeates the entire thing. This letter is written in the atmosphere of the pre-eminence of Christ.

And it's very easy to fail to recognize that as you just study the letter one piece at a time, like we've done. But the other day as I was preparing for this message, I made a photocopy of Philippians out of my Bible, and I took a number of different colored highlighters and went

through the text, and I highlighted every reference to Christ in Philippians—whether a direct reference by name, the use of a pronoun like “He,” “Him,” or “Himself,” and other indirect references. There are 104 verses in the Philippians; there are 73 references to the Lord Jesus Christ. And in 65 of those references He is named specifically or identified with a personal pronoun. That means that, on average, there is a direct reference to Christ in just under two out of every three verses in this letter! Now, I used to be a teacher, and if a student handed me a paper where the same word or phrase was repeated in two out of every three sentences, I’d give him a bad grade! That’s poor writing! “Paul, you’re being redundant!” Someone get this man a thesaurus!

No way! Paul isn’t looking for a thesaurus when it comes to His dear Lord Jesus! This man was so full of Christ that Christ is practically seeping out of his pores! “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks,” right? Well, the Lord Jesus Christ had so filled the heart of the Apostle Paul that not much time passed between words where he wasn’t speaking of his precious Lord.

And one way to observe this is to see how the most mundane practices in ancient Greek letter-writing are transformed and Christianized in the writing of the Apostle Paul. You see it in the opening. In a normal greeting that stands at the beginning of first-century Greek letters, one expects to find the word, *chairein*, the normal Greek word for expressing greetings. It was their version of our “hello.” But instead of this normal greeting, Paul employs a play on words and adapts the familiar *chairein* to the distinctively Christian, highly theological *charis*: grace. He adapts a mundane, every-day custom to reflect reality as it has been defined and transformed by Christ. One commentator says, “Here is a marvelous example of Paul’s ‘turning into gospel’ everything he sets his hand to” (Fee, *Philippians*, 70).

But more than that, right at the outset of his letter, Paul can’t even get past the greeting without using the name of Christ three times in just these two, short opening verses. He designates himself and Timothy as the slaves of Christ Jesus; he calls the brothers in Philippi the saints in Christ Jesus; and then he wishes upon them grace and peace from Christ Jesus.

You also see this in the closing of the letter as well. The ancient pattern of letter-writing leads us to expect to find the words “farewell” and/or “good luck” at the end of such a letter. But Paul’s closing is filled with heartfelt greetings to the saints, from the brethren—distinctively Christianized terms. And his final words in verse 23 are, “The grace—” not ‘of God,’ but, “The grace of *the Lord Jesus Christ* be with your spirit.” Lloyd-Jones wrote of this, “He cannot speak a last word to anybody except in terms of Christ” (*Life of Peace*, 265).

Or take notice of how Paul refers to something as mundane as his travel plans in chapter verse 19. He says, “But I hope *in the Lord Jesus* to send Timothy to you shortly.” And again in verse 24, “...and I trust *in the Lord* that I’ll be coming shortly.” I love this. At every moment the man

was conscious of the fact that Jesus is Lord—that in Him all things hold together (Col 1:17), and that He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3). Paul won't be so presumptuous as to even make travel plans without consciously submitting them to the omnipotent Lordship of Christ.

And consider the way Paul says, “Thank you.” We spoke about this recently as we examined in detail his “Thank-you note” to the Philippians in chapter 4 verses 10 to 20. You remember that we spoke about the tightrope of theological truth and charitable tact that Paul was walking in this letter—that on the one hand he wanted to express genuine thanks for their gift, but on the other hand didn't want to give the impression that he was so dependent on their gift for his joy. And so, even by means of something as seemingly-mundane as a thank-you note, he models for us a theology of Christian contentment in verses 10 to 13, and a theology of Christian giving in verses 14 to 20. Observing this reality led Martyn Lloyd-Jones to write, “There is nothing, I always feel, about this great epistle, which is more interesting than to observe in detail the way in which the Apostle does everything” (*Life of Peace*, 203). Why could he say that? Because Paul in everything he did Paul was **dominated by the Lord Jesus Christ**. Another commentator wrote, “In Paul's hand conventions are never merely conventional. Eventually everything, including these conventions, is brought under the influence of Christ and the gospel” (Fee, 462).

It's not just the big, profound, lofty theology that gets transformed in Paul's life. *Every aspect* of his life is entirely reinterpreted in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ—right down to the way he says “hello,” “goodbye,” and “thank you.” You see, for Paul, Christ wasn't just pre-eminent *over* everything—as if: “Here is the stuff of everyday life, Monday to Saturday, and Christ stands *over* all of that on Sundays, and never the twain shall meet.” No. Christ is pre-eminent *in* everything. All of life is transformed in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

And I can't think of a better way to end our study of this letter than to overwhelm you with how Christ-saturated it is. So turn to the beginning of Philippians and follow along as I track Paul's emphasis on Christ throughout the letter:

Paul speaks of himself and of Timothy as slaves of Christ (1:1).

He calls all believers saints in Christ (1:1).

He identifies Christ as the fountain of all grace and peace (1:2).

He longs for his friends with the affection of Christ (1:8).

The fruit of righteousness borne in the life of a believer comes through Jesus Christ (1:11).

Paul says his imprisonment is in the cause of Christ (1:13)

He could endure the insults of rival preachers as long as Christ was being preached (1:18).

The great passion of his life—whether in life or in death—was to magnify Christ (1:20).

In fact for him to live was Christ (1:21). And to die was gain because it meant that he would depart this life and be with Christ, which he exclaimed was very much better than anything in this life (1:23).

The Gospel itself is the Gospel of Christ, and so in real sense verse 27 calls the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of Him (1:27).

At bottom, all those who believe in Christ believe for Christ's sake (1:29), and because of the strength He gives us and the glory He promises us, we also suffer for His sake (1:29).

There is encouragement in Christ (2:1).

The great model and motivation for holy and humble living is Christ, as we are to have the attitude in ourselves which was also in Christ Jesus (2:5).

Every knee will one day bow at the name of Christ, and will confess that He is Lord (2:10–11).

Paul submits all of his plans to the sovereign Lordship of Christ. He hopes in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy (2:19), and trusts in the Lord that he'll be coming shortly (2:24).

Christians are to receive one another in Christ (2:29), to rejoice in Christ (3:1; 4:4); to glory in Christ (3:3); to stand firm in Christ (4:1), and to live in harmony with one another in Christ (4:2).

In conversion Paul counted all things as loss for the sake of Christ (3:7), and he goes on in his Christian life continuing to count all rival sources of pleasure as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ (3:8).

Everything in his life is calculated so that he might gain Christ (3:8), and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of his own, but only the righteousness from God that comes through faith in Christ (3:9).

The passion that dominated his life was to know Christ and the power of His resurrection (3:10).

The great prize for which he ran the rigorous race of the Christian life was to lay hold of Christ (3:12, 14).

And all throughout his life he eagerly awaited the return of Christ, who will transform our bodies into conformity with the body of His own glory (3:20-21).

He tells us that we can manifest gentleness to all people because Christ is near (4:5). The peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard our hearts and minds in Christ (4:7). We can be content in all circumstances in Christ (4:13), and the sovereign God will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ (4:19).

And the grace that will sustain us and keep us throughout all of the challenges of the Christian life is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (4:23).

As one writer reflected on the Christ-saturated focus of the Book of Philippians, he wrote, “The epistle witnesses to [Christ] as to a treasure worth all our seeking, at any cost; infinitely precious to our joyful finding; infinitely deserving of our keeping, of our holding, our ‘apprehending,’ as He in His mercy had laid hold of us, and will keep hold of us, even to the end; ‘unto the day of Jesus Christ’” (Moule, 260).

Oh, GraceLife, be **dominated by Christ**. Pursue him as that infinitely precious treasure worthy of all your seeking. Fix your eyes upon Him. Feast upon Him in everything you do! Be so full of Christ that he seeps out of your spiritual pores. May He come to have the pre-eminence in every aspect of our lives.