

Introduction: We continue in the book of Philippians in our Bible notes, turning this week to Paul's confidence that we will find real fellowship with Christ in His Word. May Christ Himself sustain our faith as we hold onto Him in His Word!

May we begin in a new way to recognize the gentle voice of true pastoring care. Paul deals so gently with the Philippian Epaphroditus, whom the church there had sent to help the Apostle but who had to return in failure after a near-fatal bout with severe illness. Rejoice that Christ Jesus Himself is the ultimate gentle Shepherd of the sheep, and he does not drive us beyond what we can bear.

Monday: Read Philippians 2:12-16 & Philippians 3:1.

Spiritual Safety

There is a wonderful safety for the believer as he is surrounded and protected by the Word of God. As Paul says in Philippians 3:1, it is not burdensome for him to repeat instructions regarding the Gospel, since it is for the spiritual safety of the Philippians. There is safety in the Word is because in it we find Christ (Romans 10:8-9) the security which comes from fellowship with Him.

Now we understand the goal of our faith: to find our Savior in His Word so that "Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith" (Ephesians 3:17). No wonder the Philippians are described as "holding forth" (KJV) or "holding onto" that Word as their source of life in Philippians 2:16! May our Lord also use His Word in our lives to quicken us daily through the Spirit of Christ.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the Word of God as the place in which we find rich fellowship with Christ, using hymn # 139. Keep in mind, as you sing these verses, that Christ is the "lily of the valley," the Divine Warrior against sin, and the source of our spiritual armor. In this hymn, we are really singing about Christ as we find Him in His Word.

1 Your Word is like a garden, Lord,
with flowers bright and fair;
and everyone who seeks may pluck
a lovely cluster there.
Your Word is like a deep, deep mine;
and jewels rich and rare
are hidden in its mighty depths
for every searcher there.

2 Your Word is like a starry host;
a thousand rays of light
are seen to guide the traveler,
and make his pathway bright.
Your Word is like an armory,
where soldiers may repair,
and find, for life's long battle day,
all needful weapons there.

3 O may I love your precious Word,
may I explore the mine,
may I its fragrant flowers glean,
may light upon me shine.
O may I find my armor there,
your Word my trusty sword;
I'll learn to fight with every foe
the battle of the Lord.

Tues/Weds: Read Philippians 2:17-3:1.**Willing to Go It Alone**

The Apostle found great security in fellowship with Christ in His Word, so that he could confidently and joyfully offer himself as a living sacrifice for the benefit of the Philippians (2:17-18). He writes confidently of the sacrifice and commitment of two fellow Gospel servants in Philippians 2:19-30. In short, just as *he had the apostolic confidence* to give his all for the progress of the Philippian church, so Paul presents Timothy and Epaphroditus as further evidence that the Spirit of Christ was inspiring sacrificial service in other believers who worked alongside him.

He mentions Timothy, his son in the faith (Philippians 2:19-24). His words of commendation of this young fellow-servant can hardly be higher: "I have no one else like him" (Philippians 2:20). Why such praise? Well, evidently Timothy has taken to heart the godly teaching of the Apostle. He has heard Paul's pleas in Philippians 2:3-5 that believers are to "have the mind of Christ, putting the interests of others before their own." By the Spirit of the Resurrected Christ, that mind of Timothy's selfless Savior has been planted in him.

Paul then mentions another servant of the Gospel in Philippians 2:25-30: Epaphroditus, who was a member of the Philippian church, sent to minister to the needs of the Apostle in Rome. Sadly, he fell deathly ill, and so was not able to continue to serve as Paul's fellow-servant, but had to be sent back to Philippi (Philippians 2:25, 29). Notice especially the sensitivity of the Apostle in verse 29. He urges those to whom he writes to "welcome Epaphroditus." Paul does not want anyone to look down on this minister of the Gospel, even though he was not able to finish his tour of duty or to fulfill the Philippians' ministry goals in sending him to Paul in the first place.

Meditate and Pray: Do you have a heart for downcast servants of Christ? Not every church experience for pastors works out fruitfully. May God make us a church for broken servants of the Lord, as well as for people like Timothy. May our praise for those who succeed in Gospel work not dull us to those who are laid aside. May we have the spirit of Christ our Good Shepherd, who knew how to carry weak lambs as well as lead strong ewes and rams. Sing about Christ's gentle shepherding in hymn # 599 in the red Trinity hymnal:

1 Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us,
for our use thy folds prepare:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast bought us, thine we are;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast bought us, thine we are.

2 We are thine; do thou befriend us,
be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock, from sin defend us,
seek us when we go astray:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear, O hear us when we pray;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear, O hear us when we pray.

3 Thou hast promised to receive us,
poor and sinful though we be;
thou hast mercy to relieve us,
grace to cleanse, and pow'r to free:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
let us early turn to thee;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
let us early turn to thee.

4 Early let us seek thy favor;
early let us do thy will;
blessed Lord and only Savior,
with thy love our bosoms fill:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast loved us, love us still,
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast loved us, love us still.

Thurs/Fri: Read Philippians 2:19-21 & John 16:27-33**The Mind of Christ**

When the Apostle Paul says so definitively that, “he has no one faithful like Timothy” in verse 20, he must be speaking about *a dearth of suitable leaders* who could be entrusted with the spiritual care of the Philippians. This is why Paul hopes to send Timothy soon to the church there, even if he can’t travel there himself.

But, praise God, there were still servants of the Gospel – such as Epaphroditus, Luke and others. Some could not be used right now to comfort Paul or go on his Gospel errands to Philippi -- Luke and other leaders mentioned in other letters of Paul must have been serving elsewhere as they are not listed as greeting the church in Philippians 1:1. There were “bishops and deacons” serving the Lord in that place. However, here is the source of Paul’s pain when he says, “I have no one else” in Philippians 2:20: there were few leaders willing to step forward and sacrifice for the Gospel in Philippi as Timothy and Epaphroditus had so clearly demonstrated.

The lesson? There is always such a tendency, even among church leaders, to “look unto their own things” or to “seek their own ambition’s satisfaction” or to put themselves and their own emotional desires above the preaching of the Gospel. All this is recognized by Paul in Philippians 2:21. In fact, Paul had known about such self-centered leaders in Philippians 1:15-16. Such ambitious leaders would naturally shy away from Paul’s chains and persecution, preaching as they did not out of love but out of envy (Philippians 1:15-16); serving in the name of Christ but with a minimal regard for Christ’s apostolic servant Paul.

Meditate and Pray: Before we rise up on our haunches to condemn such selfishness in others, remember how *all the Apostles in the upper room* were told directly by Jesus that they would “scatter and go each to their own ...” (John 16:32 KJV). That is, they would seek self-preservation above loyalty to their Savior. Jesus was left all alone because of the weakness of His whole church and the church’s fear of personal loss.

Things never change. The truth is, the reason Christ-centered bible study, prayer and preaching is essential is that *Christ alone* is always able to put the interests of others before His own. Such selflessness is and always will be – the “mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:5).

Let us give thanks that Jesus is willing to go it alone to be our faithful shepherd. He goes where none of His followers dare to go, does what they can never do, shows compassion when theirs has dried up, and rescues us from evil *when no other hand is stretched out to save*. Sing about Christ in His powerful selflessness, thanking Him that His arm is never too short to reach us in our dire situations, dangers and despair. Here is a hymn to keep in mind when *we feel bereft* and when *we are alone in this world*:

Reach out Thine hand, my Savior dear,
I long to feel Thy presence near;
When Thou art near, my soul is blest,
In Thee I find sweet peace and rest.

Reach out Thine hand and take me in,
And let me now Thy favors win;
I’m sorely tossed upon the sea,
I long to hide myself in Thee. (*Refrain*)

Refrain - *O Savior dear, reach out Thine hand,
And by Thy side, O let me stand,
Till Thou shalt say, Enough, My child,
No longer face the tempest wild.*

How oft I’m tempted on the way,
And foes surround me every day;
O Savior dear, reach out Thine hand,
And lead me to the Beulah land.

Sat/Sun: Read Philippians 2:19-3:3 & Isaiah 40:9-11.**Gentle Shepherd**

We see how gentle Paul was to the weakest of his brethren, Epaphroditus, given his likely sense of failure when he had to return home to Philippi instead of staying to help Paul.

Such pastoral sensitivity also motivates Paul's anger against false teachers in Philippians 3:2-3. There were some coming to Philippi announcing the need for salvation by good works, including circumcision. These false teachers taught that Jesus Christ alone, grasped by grace alone, through faith alone, was not enough to save. Paul calls these teachers dogs! Just as Jesus, as a gentle Shepherd of His sheep, could not contain his wrath against such false shepherds, so Paul had no time for such deadly false teaching.

Meditate and Pray: Let us give thanks that Jesus is such an active and compassionate Shepherd – who will not allow the roaring lion Satan to devour His precious lambs. Give thanks also for Apostolic teaching from such a lion-hearted leader of Christ's church as Paul.

We especially ought to be learn, as we see Christ's care for His church reflected through the Apostle, that Christ is not willing to give up on the weakest of His lambs. When it comes to those near death, such as Epaphroditus, Christ is willing to carry near His heart those who are too weak to serve Him, and to tenderly care for those set aside by deadly trials. In this way, Christ fulfills the ideal of pastoral care from Isaiah 40:9-11:

⁹ O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

¹¹ He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

These verses are expounded with real comfort to Christ's sheep:

We have both here together: Tender compassion and assistance. The whole frame wherein He is described in Isaiah 40:9-11 is a frame of the greatest tenderness, compassion and condescension that can be imagined. His people are set forth under many infirmities; some are lambs, some great with young, some very tender, some burdened with temptations – nothing in any of them all strong or comely. To them all Christ is a shepherd that feeds His own sheep and drives them out to pleasant pasture; where, if He sees a poor, weak lamb, He doth not thrust him on, but takes him into His bosom, where He both easeth and refresheth him: He leads him gently and tenderly. As did Jacob them that were burdened with young, so doth our dear Lord Jesus with His flock, in the several ways and paths wherein He leads them.

When He sees a poor soul, weak, tender, halting, ready to sink and perish, He takes him into His arms, by some gracious promise administered to him, carries him, bears him up when he is not able to go one step forward. This is that which our careful, tender husband would do for us. (John Owen Works, vol. 2, pg. 142)