

# Paul's Prison Epistles

LESSON  
FIVE

## Paul and the Philippians

### Discussion Forum



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# Paul's Prison Epistles

## Lesson Five: Paul and the Philippians

### Discussion Forum

With  
Dr. Reggie Kidd

Students  
Graham Buck  
Wes Sumrall

#### Question 1:

**Does Philippians address all types of suffering, or only suffering for the gospel?**

**Student:** Reggie, I have heard the book of Philippians be called the “epistle of joy” but in the lesson it seems that we really focus on Paul’s persevering the midst of trial. Clearly Paul is suffering for the gospel, but does the letter speak equally to Christians in all types of suffering or is it primarily focused on Christians who were suffering for the gospel?

**Dr. Kidd:** Good question, Wes. The letter is a great sort of paradigm or picture of the challenge for all of us to learn well from Scripture because often we realize we are listening in on someone else’s conversation. And we have to understand in the first place what is being said there and then get our bearings from there. And as you rightly observed, in this case Paul is specifically suffering for his profession of faith, his proclamation of the gospel. And some of us are going to experience exactly that kind of suffering and others of us are just going to deal with the hard stuff of life whether it’s sickness, failed relationships, dealing with our ongoing sin problem. And the joy of reading Scripture is recognizing that the same Lord and Christ who authored this is also at work in our lives and can give us wisdom by the Holy Spirit to pay close attention to what he is saying here. And also then to extract from here the wisdom that we need and the counsel that we need to help us in matters that are a little bit further removed but in which we need the same sort of comfort and the same sort of call to be joyful in the midst of difficult circumstances.

#### Question 2:

**Is Paul’s joy related to his suffering, or to his relationship with the Philippians?**

**Student:** Do you think that Paul’s joy is somehow closely connected to the fact that he is suffering for the gospel? Or is it that he feels this joy because of the audience to whom he is writing?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, I don't know that that's really an "either/or". There is a certain loneliness that I think he feels at this particular moment in his imprisonment. And he has taken special comfort himself in not just the financial gift that Epaphroditus has brought from Philippi but what it represents about their love, their concern, their esteem for him. It's good to be reminded that Paul writes Philippians about the same time that he writes Colossians, where he talked about the privilege of completing the sufferings of Christ, and that brings into view this whole biblical narrative of God's suffering Son coming in the middle of time and accomplishing a redemption that inaugurates or brings in God's kingdom and then leaves physically to go to heaven, to sit at the right hand of the Father, and then to minister in this age through the Holy Spirit as his kingdom continues in anticipation of its consummation when he comes back. And the recognition that goes with that that because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, Jesus is among us. And when his people hurt, whether that's for proclaiming the gospel as Paul is doing or whether it's just knowing the stuff of what it is to live in that period of time between the inauguration of the kingdom and its final consummation, that the Lord himself grieves. He is hurt and he feels our pain because he is among us. And so, part of the of the poignancy of this letter is that it connects us with what Christ is doing among his people and how we have the privilege, as Paul goes on to say here, of knowing the fellowship of his sufferings.

### **Question 3:**

#### **Was it sinful for Paul to want to die?**

**Student:** So Reggie, what you seem to be saying is Paul was not so much despairing as he was just experiencing these real emotions of depression and loneliness but it seems in the text that he is really kind of struggling with this choice of whether he wants to live and still be able to preach the gospel or to die and go be with Christ. But was it sinful for Paul to want to die? And should Christians want to live, or should they want to die, and why?

**Dr. Kidd:** That's a great question, Wes and you read though this and you really do get the sense that this guy can't decide whether it would be better to go be with the Lord or stay here. And the fact of the matter is to go and be with the Lord is a good thing. It is a wonderful thing. It's remarkable, as precious as the continuation of fellowship with Jesus on the other side of the grave is to Paul, that he doesn't speculate more on just what's that like. All he says is to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. He doesn't fill it in with a lot of the speculation that we get in the popular literature and so many funeral or memorial sermons that go on and on about streets of gold and all that other stuff. He is really rather reserved about that but it's clear that he recognizes that his death would bring, not just a continuation of the fellowship that he has with Jesus now, but an enhancement. And at the same time he does recognize that the whole pattern of the incarnation was about the one who was the most privileged, the second person of the trinity. Always God, always will be

God, laying aside the prerogatives of his deity, laying aside his glory to clothe himself with our humanity and coming to serve us. And I think at the end of the day that principle wins for Paul. As much as he knows how spectacular it would be to go and be with the Lord that the Lord has given him a calling to care for other people the way Christ had cared for him and the way that Christ cares for his church.

#### **Question 4:**

**How could Paul be both depressed and joyful at the same time?**

**Student:** So Reggie, we've just talked about this being Paul's epistle of joy but in it he really does seem to be in a bit of despair and depression. How does he manage to feel both those emotions and joy at the same time? Doesn't rejoicing sort of mean that you have already beaten those other emotions?

**Dr. Kidd:** That's a great question, Graham, and it's a good opportunity to focus on why Paul has been able to speak so powerfully over the centuries to the church. Here is the guy, I think, who really gets it about knowing Christ and understanding that knowing Christ is not being just sort of lifted out of the reality of your life. Here is a guy who is fully in touch with the hard stuff that is facing him. He is in prison. He's got people who are supposed to be on his side who are outside, who are proclaiming Christ all the more because they think it's going to make his situation worse. Meanwhile, he is worried about false teachers coming back into this church and bringing up old stuff that he had thought that he had dealt with in the letter to the Galatians. He has the very real possibility that he is going to be executed and he is just not in denial about the really hard stuff. And it's like often, I think, we tend to treat, in the church, joy as being some sort of glib happiness that you just kind of go for and put on by denying the hard things in your life. And what Paul has come to recognize is that stepping each day into that day's measure of a share in the sufferings of Christ is the place that you get to know him better. So, there is, I think, the things that feel despairing or that carry keen disappointment in Paul are really the backdrop against which, I think, way down in the depths of who he is he able to know the presence of one who is with him. And that's the place that you know joy, and it's just so very different than glib happy-clappy.

#### **Question 5:**

**Is the joy Paul described more a recognition of Christ than an emotive experience?**

**Student:** So that we can experience this kind of joy, is it fair to say it is more of recognition of the reality of who Christ is and what he is doing than so much an emotive experience?

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, it's a knowledge that creates its own sense. I mean, there is an experience that comes out of that. But it's a more settled, it's a surer, it's a deeper affection for him knowing that his love took him all the way to the cross and makes us near to him even now. I think one of the ways to distinguish Paul from like a false vision of joy is to think about stoics who were contemporary to him, whose idea was to just develop a total emotional passivity so that nothing affects you. And basically it's kind of like what my dad used to say to me, "Reggie, never let your highs be too high or your lows be too lows, just try to find that middle ground." And that's what the stoics were after, just kind of find this bland neutral grey, you know, or lukewarm-ness in your heart. And Paul is about recognizing the joy and the wonder of Christ's resurrection and the profound sadness of what it is still to be living in a fallen world as a fallen creature needing to lean towards the day in which everything is made new. So, for Paul, knowing Christ is recognizing that emotionally we live with black and white. We live with way up and way down, and knowing Christ is knowing him as the one that holds all that together, not negating. So, Paul's world is not bland gray. It's like black, black; white, whites; and super, super bright intense yellows, reds, and blues. And just recognizing that not denying the emotional range of life in this world is where you know the real Christ and not just some stoic denial of your emotions and denial of reality. And it's out of that knowledge of the real that the experience of real joy comes about.

### **Question 6:**

#### **Did Christian or secular virtues motivate the Philippians to care for Paul?**

**Student:** So Reggie, it seems like the Philippians are really good friends to Paul. I mean they support him emotionally, financially, in prayer. Were these kinds of things particularly cultural values and virtues that just happened to be in that time period or are they more specifically Christian virtues? And what sort of relationship, if there is a difference, should Christian virtues have with non-Christian virtues?

**Dr. Kidd:** Great question, Graham. Back in Paul's day benefactors would be given all kinds of honors by people who were dependent upon them and you could be a benefactor through your wealth. You could be a benefactor through your teaching. And teachers in Paul's day would often go around and they would collect for themselves audiences. And there would be this reciprocity or system of exchange, where I share with you my wisdom and you become my clientele and sort of a whole system of duties and obligations would come into play. And the teacher would sort of be this elevated person. And you can see Jesus already in his ministry seeking to undercut that, you know, like when he says in Matthew 23, "Don't let them call you teacher. You are a brother."

And one of the things that becomes clearer and clearer to me over time is how much Paul sees himself not just as the guy who gives us the statutes and decrees, but the

ones who seeks to know Jesus and to model Jesus for people. In this letter in particular, I think we see him cutting against the grain of standard benefactor relationships, which are often even called friendships, but they're not really friendships. There is one person who is in power and the other person is a dependent and they sort of create mutual obligations. What he points to so significantly in this letter, especially in chapter 2, is the way that Jesus related to us in the servant form and the language of warmth, the language of servanthood, commending Timothy as a servant, talking about Epaphroditus as their servant of his behalf and then his servant on their behalf. I think he is working really hard to establish a much deeper kind of bond of affection that is rooted not in reciprocal exchange but in all of us being the recipients of a grace that we could never repay so that we look not to our own interests and not to how our investments in our people builds up more social capital and puts them in more debt to us. But we live out our eternal indebtedness to the Lord who has freely paid for our sins and who has come among us, as what Jesus says he himself is, one who is among us to wait tables, to be our foot washer. And Paul calls the Philippians along with him to a lifestyle of that kind of servant love instead of that kind of normal system of reciprocities.

**Student:** So, kind of what you are saying is that the external things that we do may be similar to non-Christians but the internal motivations are entirely different.

**Dr. Kidd:** The same sort of spirit of liberality, community-mindedness, generosity that pagan philosophers would encourage among other people, Paul is encouraging that same sort of spirit. But not for the same sort of exchange back that people would expect in their social world. Their reward is from the Lord. Their reward is in seeing Christ being more formed among other people. It's not looking to your own interests but looking really to the interests of other people because your friend is taking care of you forever.

### Question 7:

#### Why did Paul feel such strong affection for the Philippians?

**Student:** So Reggie, even though the Philippians gave him all this money, Paul really seems to be working against this idea so you really couldn't say that the Philippians bought Paul's affections because it seems like his internal motivation would be different than what was going on in the secular world outside of him with the benefactors.

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, that's well put, Wes, and from Paul's letters to the Corinthians, we know he had a great deal of sensitivity towards the idea of being bought. One of the reasons that he was unwilling to accept the generosity of the Corinthians and their support for him was that he recognized that they saw in it a way of their establishing power over him and of their buying him as their like teacher. And to him he says, "Look, I didn't accept your support because I didn't want the kind of relationship that



that would have established between us.” And the very reason that he can accept the generosity of the Philippians is because he recognizes that they don't have those sort of cultural strings attached that would sort of create an obligation back to them beyond the obligation he has to love the Lord and to speak the truth to them in love.

### Question 8:

#### Was it normal for very diverse groups to be involved in the same local congregation?

**Student:** Reggie, the lesson talks about several different converts that Paul had in Philippi. There was Lydia the merchant, there was the demonized slave girl, and there was the Philippian jailer. I mean these are people who come from very different social classes and just very different types of folks. Was it normal for such diverse groups to be involved in the same church gathering in Philippi? Or would they have gone to different churches there and maintained the social distance?

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, I think, Wes, that what we are supposed to infer is that this becomes one people. In the pagan world, people from those kinds of different backgrounds, they would have divided themselves up in their social circles. The trade guild people would have their group and the more elevated people would have their group and certainly a little demonized slave girl would have no place at either of those. And what is remarkable about what Christ is doing, as Paul sees it, is building one fellowship of people from all races, all tribes, all kinds of social backgrounds. And it would have been really remarkable but the picture we get here of a singular church and I think we should think of it as being a church made up of your Lydia's, and your Philippian jailers, and your demonized slave girls.

**Student:** So, Paul really hits home in this breaking down of these dividing walls, like when he mentions in Romans that there are no longer Jew or Greek, slave nor free but that we are one. He is really pushing for that, isn't he?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, it's actually in Colossians, which he writes right around this time, where he is really pushing that along with the letter to the Galatians. And I think that he sees that as being something that is to be modeled. And one of the reasons I think he comes around to identifying us as the true circumcision, who worship — exactly how he says that is really kind of nice to see — “We are the true circumcision who worship God in spirit and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” The divisions that are a function of our social backgrounds, we set those aside. And that is why Paul goes on to talk about, you know, if anyone would have confidence in the flesh it'd be me. And all those just go by the wayside because what brings us together is the one circumcision that we share and that is Christ Jesus was cut off. And we have been baptized together into this place in Colossians that he refers to as the one new man. Then he refers to him in Ephesians as the one new man that Christ has brought together at the cross.

So, for him, the bringing together of these kids of people this is part of the way that Jesus in Ephesians 3:10 demonstrates the wisdom of God to the powers and principalities. What you demonic forces were seeking to break up, I have brought together and in this community of reconciliation where there has been one family made up of the blood of Jesus, this one new circumcision. These people who have been baptized together, this is the signal that the day of social destruction, the day of social decay, the day of lovelessness, those days are numbered.

**Student:** Reggie, I guess it begs the question, should churches today look more like the first century church in this regard? It seems like churches today tend to group by social class more so and it's not so much a question of denomination but just a type of people. When churches do group like this are we not living in light of the fact that Christ has reconciled when we group together like this?

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, Wes, the question that does demand an answer for is why we don't work harder to realize relationships that are not based on preference, not based on the kind of car we drive, not based on having the same age children, or having the same age and stage in life but look intentionally for relationships that take us outside of our own social comfort zone. And relate to people that the only thing we have in common is the blood of Jesus Christ and the fact that he has befriended us and made us part of his family. That would be an amazing statement to a rightly skeptical world when they see us dividing up just the same way that everyone else does.

### Question 9:

#### Should we focus on both Paul and Timothy as joint authors of Philippians?

**Student:** In our lessons, we make a lot of important in the writer of the letter, the background of the audience, and that sort of thing. When Paul opens Philippians, he says it's both from him and Timothy. We don't really talk about Timothy too much. Should we look at him and his life circumstances as well to try and get a full understanding of this letter?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, Graham, it's a good point because Paul makes a point not just to have Timothy alongside him in the writing of the letter, but he is going to send Timothy along as one who himself is learning what it is to live the Jesus-shaped life on behalf or in the midst of the Philippians. I appreciate what Paul says here in 2:19 and following. This is right after he has called the Philippians to look at Jesus who was in the form of God, came among us, now is exalted, and now he challenges them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. And then he says, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you" — so Timothy is going to bring word back to Paul — "I have no one like him who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. They all look after their own interest, not

those of Jesus Christ.” So Timothy is one in whom Paul has seen exactly what he is encouraging among the Philippians and that we see in Jesus, someone who is not looking to his own interests but to the interests of other people because of Christ Jesus. “But Timothy’s worth, you know. How as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.” They are going all the way back to the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey when Paul tapped Timothy and drew him out to be his understudy or his protégé so he could pour his life into him, and he would learn Christ from Paul. “I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it would go with me, and I trust in the Lord that soon I shall come also.”

Timothy would be a wonderful study because if the pastoral epistles were written after these, which I think they were, we see that Paul — the pastoral epistles being 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus — we see that not long after this, despite his fears of being executed, was released from prison and ministered again back in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Basin, where he wasn’t really sure that he that would be able to. When he gives that speech in Acts 20 to the Ephesians elders, he just said, “I don’t think I’m going to be back.” But it looks like he is going to be able to go back and he left Timothy, his young protégé and understudy, to represent him there. So, Timothy is one who is, for us, a great study of a younger man who comes to the tutelage of an older man who is able to embody Christ, to teach Christ, and entrust him to go, and live it out, and teach it out.

**Student:** So, Timothy is more an exemplar than so much we should understand him in the midst of the purpose and writing of this letter?

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, I think his...and Timothy’s is not so much an indication of co-authorship as I have Timothy alongside me who is going to be with you. Perhaps carrying this letter, perhaps being the one to provide the commentary, and the elucidation that, here is what this means.

### Question 10:

**What can we learn from the way that Paul exhorted Euodia and Syntyche?**

**Student:** Reggie, Paul calls Euodia and Syntyche to each other in the Lord in his epistle. Is this a form of public rebuke and exhortation where he calls them to agree with each other? It seems like a form of church discipline. Is this an example for us in today’s church to be calling people out in public like this and in writing?

**Dr. Kidd:** It’s a good question, Wes, and I think it’s important to get clear on the relational reality out of which this comes. These are people who know each other. You were talking about a time when the church meets. They meet in houses and homes where everybody knows each other. Which means that conflict affects everybody, but it also means that when I call your name I’m not calling your name

out in front of people who don't know you. And so we have to appreciate the scale that's at stake, that's involved here. It's a small scale. We have to appreciate the fact that the church here is not like some impersonal gathering where if I call you out I'm calling you out in front of people who don't know you and I'm shaming you in that sort of fashion.

And just the whole relational bond that you have to assume that is there between Paul and these ladies because he refers to them as those who have struggled mightily along with me and with Clement. And the fact that he refers in a way that's really unusual in his letters, he speaks specifically to a particular person and says, "I want you to help them out." He says this is "a genuine yolk fellow", a "*syzygus*". And we don't know if that's someone body's name or it may be a particular person who is in a position to really help them out. I think that what we can assume if that Paul does this because he is seeking to lubricate the relationship rather than make it more difficult. And in lots of church settings that would not be the effect. You know, if you are in a church of five hundred, a thousand, fifteen hundred, or two thousand and you start calling people out, I think you are getting into manipulative shame. And the kind of things that you would want to say are going to be far more effective if you said it in private.

**Student:** So, is this more like applicable to a small group meeting or some sort of home group type thing?

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, where there is a relationship and I might say, "Graham, I really wish that you and Wes would work this thing out. It's holding our group back. We can't really go any further and you know that, until there is a reconciliation here."

**Student:** Is there any particular reason why Paul put it here in the letter or is it just he finished one argument and he is moving onto something else?

**Dr. Kidd:** I hadn't really thought about that, Graham, but it is the place where he has said what he needs to say about Christ not looking to his own interests but looking to our interests. He has talked about his own struggle to know joy in the mist of false teachers, teachers who are teaching the right thing for the wrong reason, his anxiety that the church in Philippi is concerned about one of their own who's there and who's sick. And he has talked about how he is going to send Timothy as one who has modeled what he is talking about and who will be among them and who he expects to bring back a good report. And he's talked in chapter 3 about his own finding his identity, not in his background but in being found in Christ and pressing on. And I think, at this point, he has set the stage nicely to go to these two ladies and say, "Look, the conflict between you, it's not just some mission that is being held up here but the whole opportunity, the whole responsibility of the church is to model who Christ is. And I know that you know that. So in that regard, you know it's time to really work this out."

**Question 11:****What did Paul mean when he said that Jesus made himself nothing?**

**Student:** Reggie, in Paul's poem, or however you want to call it, in the letter he says that Jesus emptied himself, and I have heard people talk about that that means he lost some of his divine attributes or other things like that. How can that be? Could Jesus still be God and not have certain characteristics?

**Dr. Kidd:** Graham, from way back in the history of the church in the Byzantine Era all the way up to today, there are people who are wrongly teaching that Jesus diminished his divinity when he came along us. But the Orthodox Church has felt the need to maintain, and I think rightly so, that his emptying himself is not a diminishing of his deity. It's more an adding his humanity and coming among us in such a way that it is not his own interests that he comes to serve. I mean he had every right to just stay in Heaven forever and just be the eternal Son of God, the eternal second person of the trinity and enjoy the fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit that always was and that would be restored after the project of the incarnation by which he added humanity to his being. And when he comes among us, he comes as a servant. That's the point here and it's important I think here for us to recognize that when he is among us, he is still God. In the early church, it became important to stress that he was strong enough to save us. And at the same time, it was important to confess his complete humanity so that he could actually heal us and he could actually take the rap for us.

**Student:** So, I guess that's why some translations say he humbled himself rather than he emptied himself?

**Dr. Kidd:** Actually, it uses both verbs in here. It uses he emptied himself and he humbled himself but I think your point is well taken. The humbling is an explanation of the emptying himself. It's not a losing of his divinity. It is an adding his humanity in such a way that he could come among us as one who serves, as one who washes feet, as one who allows himself to be accused of being a criminal wrongly and to be cursed by the Father so that the Father can declare us righteous through his death.

**Student:** So, it's not so much that he loses divine attributes or anything like that but in that adding of his humanity he takes on our limitations?

**Dr. Kidd:** He takes on our limitations, and it's hard not to switch over to the logic of the writer to the Hebrews where he talks about how Jesus, though he was a Son, learned obedience. He comes and it's that that qualifies him to be our priest and our sacrifice. And the whole project of the incarnation, it has so many dimensions to it. In his incarnation he models true Sonship. He models what it is for us to live as sons of God. In his incarnation he comes to provide the obedience to the law that Israel had been called to but was never able to live. He does it in our place and he does it so that on the far side of his bearing the curses of the law, we could see what we are

supposed to live like. And prime among the things that he comes to model in his limitations is, "I don't have to assert my rights. I could call down legions of angels at any point but I'm not going to do that because I have come to serve and that means putting other people's interests above my own."

### **Question 12:**

#### **What is the difference between perseverance and preservation?**

**Student:** Reggie, in some traditions people talk more about preservation rather than perseverance. What is the difference between preservation and perseverance? Are these two concepts, are they at odds with each other and how is it that the lesson focuses more on perseverance than preservation?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, I think Wes, that we tried to be true in the lesson to Paul's own emphasis, which I think is on perseverance. But there are plenty of notes about the other side of that which is preservation. Perseverance is this relationship from our side, the need to press on, and as we said in the lesson, we need to believe the truth and to live rightly. But there are notes in Philippians and we tried to be true to them, that are on the preservations side, which is that is what God does behind the scenes to keep us.

In Philippians 1:6, Paul says, as we pointed out in the lesson, persuaded of this, "That the one who began among you and in you a good work will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus." Paul doesn't get around to talking to us about our duty to persevere without first letting us know his own confidence in the fact that the one who began this thing in us, he's not just sitting back saying, "Well, I'm going to look and see what happens to Wes. Good luck." But he is at work in us then at the very time when Paul says the thing that most stresses our need to persevere, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." He recalls this note that, "The same one who began a good work in us, he is at work in us both to will and to work according to his good pleasure." So it's a "both/and". We are kidding ourselves if we think we can persevere without his preserving power and at the same time Paul does seem to be...and I think largely it is because of the relationship that he has with these folks, that he feels so free to talk with them about the privilege, as well as the responsibility, of a persevering faith, of you know, believing the right thing and then living it out in such a way that our life becomes more and more characterized by the one who's has taken up residency within us.

**Student:** So, if these two things are not at odds with one another then it's probably true that depending on, say, where we are in are in life or maybe somebody who we are talking to in life, we can use either one or the other as good biblical encouragement?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well yeah, Graham. It takes a great deal of discernment to figure out whether the person you are talking to needs more the softer, “He really loves you and he’s got a hold of you and he’s not going to let you go.” Or when the person you are talking to, you can just see that you are kind of sitting there and they need to be challenged to get up and walk. Like Jesus, in John 5, where he comes to the guy who has been at the pool there in Jerusalem for thirty-eight years and he has just given up on ever getting healed. And Jesus comes up to him and says, “Do you want to be healed?” And sometimes that’s our job to say, “Do you really like it there?”

When I was in college I played baseball and I was not a very good hitter. I didn’t have a very strong arm but I could work with pitchers and I could block balls that were thrown in the dirt. And a good catcher gets to know his pitchers and some pitchers need to be encouraged no matter how badly they are doing. “You are doing great. You’ve got it in you. Just keep going.” And other pitchers, their brain is somewhere else and you just need to say, “Hey, will you get with the program?” And it’s wise pastoral discernment. It’s pastoring that is determined to get to know people and know, in a particular moment, which side of the equation they need to hear. God is going to preserve you. Don’t let go because he is not going to let go of you. Or when you need to say, “Dude, you need to ratchet it out and you know that don’t you?” So, it’s time to stress the perseverance.

### Question 13:

#### Do our good works contribute to our salvation?

**Student:** Reggie, Paul says that we’re to work out our salvation. You sort of mention it a little bit in the lesson but I’m still kind of confused. Does that mean our works actually do something for our salvation, like have an effectual impact on it? Or is he talking about something else?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, it’s pretty clear for Paul that our salvation is done. What Christ did on the cross, paid the penalty for our sins once and for all. That’s why he is so upset about people who are enemies of the cross that they don’t understand all that the cross does for us. As far as Paul is concerned, that’s a done deal. And yet, it’s a relationship that has to be lived out or it’s not a relationship. That’s why we talked about the need to believe the right things but then to live righteously, to live on the basis of that truth. And what happens is the right living reinforces the faith.

I love what C.S. Lewis does with eternal life in *The Great Divorce* where his point is that eternal life has already begun for us. And we just go deeper into it over time and at the end of time when the Lord comes back and all accounts are settled, we find out that the eternal life that we all think of as being in the future has either begun in this life or it doesn’t begin at all. The sad reality is that there are a lot of people who have said the right words, who have prayed a sinner’s prayer, and then have just gone on to live their lives as though that weren’t true. And for Paul, the living of a life that puts a

lie to that original prayer of faith, that original life, proves that that original prayer of faith was not really a prayer of faith because a prayer of faith is going to produce a certain kind of life because it is reflective of the Holy Spirit making us alive. And if we have been regenerate and made alive, for Paul, there is going to be a certain kind of life that goes along with that.

**Student:** So, that's kind of where Paul is saying the same thing as say James. "Show me your faith by what you do."

**Dr. Kidd:** For James, the proof of the profession of faith lies in the life that gets lived out.

### Question 14:

**Does God ever use the outwardly good works of unbelievers to bring them to faith?**

**Student:** Now, if there is kind of this reciprocal relationship between them. Are there any cases in which maybe people start doing things first and God uses that to bring them to subsequent faith?

**Dr. Kidd:** It's really hard to tell how that loop can work. Paul has this keen sense of there has to be God doing something in you. There is an indicative that has to happen that we can receive only by faith and then his appeal to obedience flows out of that. But then you do have a sense that that greater obedience which is going to involve belonging to God's people, having truth reinforced in all kinds of ways by seeing it in other people, that belonging to those people, living in that certain way, deepens our sense of faith.

Now, it so happens that for many of us, even before we believe, we find ourselves in this force field of that kind of community. We see it in other people and we come alongside and we attach ourselves to it and the Holy Spirit mysteriously uses that whole process of our kind of — even though we don't really believe and don't belong in that eternal sense — we find ourselves attached to God's people. This certainly happened with me. I was just loved by Christians and felt a part of their community. And it was being sort of this almost on the inside but kind of being aware that I wasn't really on the inside that made me long for what it was that would really make me belong to this. What switch needed to be flipped in my life to make me really like what I saw in them that I liked but I knew just wasn't in me.

**Student:** So, you were part of the group and doing things with the group but there was still that sense of something deeper.



**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, and that's the thing that the Lord has to do to wake you up to why they are really like that. And you're wanting to be like that but just can't find the where with all.

### **Question 15:**

**How can good things come from preaching the gospel with wicked motives?**

**Student:** Reggie, Paul says in his letter that there are those who are preaching the gospel in order to get him in trouble but he says he is okay with that because for whatever reason Christ is being preached. How is it that good things can come from these people with wicked motives?

**Dr. Kidd:** Here it's helpful to recognize that in Christian ethics historically we have talked about the need for something to be true according to God's standard. That it needs to fit the situation and it needs to come out of faith and sincere motives. The reality is, there are lots of things that you do and I do that are going to be according to God's standard and are going to fit the situation but honestly, they come out of bad motives. You know, we are doing the right thing for the wrong reason. And one of the great things about God's grace is that even when we are doing the right thing for the wrong reason God is still going to be able to use it. He just is or he wouldn't be able to use anything because none of us can ever pretend to have pure motives.

I had a friend who once said, "Look, if it weren't for mixed motives I wouldn't have any motives at all. I wouldn't even get out of bed in the morning." So, I love the fact that Paul said this and that the Lord put this in the Canon. This is a call to all of us in the first place, to look at ourselves and to recognize that none of us has pure motives. And then it's a call to us to extend some charity to people who are often doing the right thing and we can tell it's for the wrong reasons. We can tell that it's sometimes even to our disadvantage but the point is Christ is able to use it. And we can stop running the universe and we can recognize that God, the God who created the greatest good out of possible, out of an evil scheme of Herod, Pilate, and Christ's enemies to put him on the cross, that God did the greatest good out of the worst thing ever done on planet earth. He can use people who are doing good ministry even though we can see that the motives are often really bad or at least questionable.

### **Question 16:**

**How should we respond to those who preach the gospel with wicked motives?**

**Student:** How do we take that when we do see this going on? We don't want to go so far as to stop them from doing ministry but somehow instruct or exhort them.

**Dr. Kidd:** It kind of depends on relationship. If I can build a relationship where I can make a difference and where I can ennoble somebody else's motives, the Lord would call me to do that. Sure, absolutely.

**Student:** So, it's better that they keep on ministering than to just say, "Cut it out," but to walk alongside them?

**Dr. Kidd:** Sure, and part of what Paul is trying to help us understand is that none of us gets it all right from our doctrine, to the way we are obeying and living it out, to the motives that we have. And we need to draw close. You know, we need to be in accountability relationships ourselves. We need to be in submission to authorities and we need to ask them to...I need to be around colleagues that will ask me why I am doing what I'm doing. And to help me struggle with the gap between the good I know that I ought to be doing and the good I am doing but am doing for the wrong reasons.

**Student:** That really seems to open the gates in terms of what God can use in his sovereignty and really to give a bigger picture of who God is in his power and sovereignty.

**Dr. Kidd:** I love what Abraham Kuyper says about the genius of Calvinism as a theological system. It is not primarily based on the need of the individual to find a relationship with God. It includes that but it's based the premise that God is about bringing glory to himself and he is reclaiming the planet. And he has not been intimidated by the curse. He was not intimidated by Satan's fall. He was not intimidated by our original forbearer's rebellion. He was not intimidated by Israel's disobedience. He is not intimidated by yours and mine and he works all things together for the good of those who love Christ Jesus.

### Question 17:

#### Who are the "true circumcision"?

**Student:** What did Paul mean when he called the Philippians the "true circumcision"? Were they remnants of the faithful Jews or were they something different? And is it the case that Gentiles can be part of the circumcision? What is the theological significance of all of that?

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, Wes. It's an extraordinary thing that is going on in Paul's theology cause he calls these people the "true circumcision". And let's go back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey where we get, you know, what little portrait we have of this church. But I think it's a revealing one. It would have a person like Lydia in it. And we find her at the place of prayer on the Sabbath where Jews would be meeting but Luke simply calls her a worshipper of God. We don't know. She might be a Gentile God-fearer who has attached herself to the Jewish people or she might be Jewish herself. We just don't know. The point is...well, we just don't know. The Philippian

jailer would have been a Gentile, and the demon-possessed girl, who had the demon exorcised from her, would have been a Gentile. These are the kind of people who would have been in this church and without qualification Paul calls them the true circumcision.

Again, this letter was written around the same time as Colossians where Paul refers to the people in that church who would have been from Gentile backgrounds. He refers to them as having received their circumcision in a circumcision made without hands, in the circumcision of Christ, I think, meaning Christ's own death as sort of the metaphorically the foreskin of the human race who is cursed so that we might be accepted. And the way that they experienced that circumcision is through their baptism, and by their being joined to the new people of God. And that's why he can refer here in Philippians 3 to the true circumcision as being comprised in worshipping God in spirit, in the Holy Spirit who makes you alive in Christ Jesus, by taking our curse upon himself has taken a tension away by any confidence we could put in our flesh.

So, all of circumcision's symbolic power is now ours through Christ and we experience that through baptism. And you just think what circumcision would have symbolized. It would have symbolized the shedding of blood for sin. It would have symbolized consecration. The cutting off of the foreskin is a sign of dedication. I'm so in this that may what happened to this foreskin happen to me if I don't keep covenant. Well, good luck with that. And then third, it is a sign of membership in the people of God and that's exactly what baptism symbolized. And that is why you move from Colossians 2:11 to 2:12, where Paul refers to circumcision and then to baptism because baptism is a picture of our union with Christ in his death, his burial, and his resurrection where he paid the penalty for our sin and gave us new life. It is the place where we take the pledge. It's the place where we come alongside Christ and say, "Yes, his death is mine and his life is mine as well. And it's a place where we come to belong to God's people."

As Paul says to the Galatians, "Everybody who has been baptized into Christ Jesus is now part of the new humanity." We put on Christ and this is a place where there is no Jew/Gentile, male/female, slave/free. So, it's a sign of belonging. So, the point now is the Israel of God, the true circumcision, is defined by the true Israelite Jesus Christ. And everybody who belongs to him is a genuine son of Abraham, a true son of the circumcision. Whether you are a boy or a girl, whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, whether you are slave or free, no matter where you are from.

### **Question 18:**

#### **What are the central concepts of the gospel?**

**Student:** Reggie, so, there are kind of two groups of people that Paul is speaking against in this letter. There are those that we talked about earlier that were

**preaching the gospel to bring him pain and then there are others who apparently are preaching another gospel. He doesn't really rail too hard against the first group but he really goes hard against the second group. What are, if you could say, the fundamentals or the central concepts of the gospel that perhaps this group was getting that these weren't? And why would he go so hard against that second group?**

**Dr. Kidd:** That's a well-put question, Graham. It's important to recognize that Paul will accept people who are preaching what he considers to be the true gospel even if they are doing it in such a way that it causes him personal pain. But he has no patience with people who are preaching what he considers to be a false gospel. He calls them the mutilation in here. And the place where he gives us a hint of what he has in mind is at the end of 3:18, where he says that they are enemies of the cross of Christ. And that has to mean something like they are teaching in such way that what Christ did on the cross is not necessary. And probably the best way to think about that is what he says in chapter 3, that "I want to be found in the righteousness of Christ" and that is a righteousness that is only established by God, for us, at the cross as God punishes Christ in our place as Christ becomes our stand-in, our righteousness. So, the merit of Christ has to be applied to us, his righteousness on our behalf because our sin is taken away at the cross.

For Paul, you don't hold to the righteousness of Christ being ours because of the cross and as far as he is concerned, you become an enemy of the cross and spiritually his enemy as well. You are teaching a false gospel. He says that their belly is their god and when there is teaching that really is about...when teaching is about, really, not our coming into our obedience to the Lord and being brought into line with him and his purposes but when he just becomes the chaplain for our desires and he is just called to come in and bless our way of life, an addendum to our personal agenda that is really driven by our own appetites or our desires, whether it's literal hunger or whether it's sexual appetite or whether it's materialism, whether ambition. Whenever God becomes a servant to our bellies, for Paul, that is a false gospel.

And the other thing that he says in here is that their god is their belly and they glory in their shame. And that's all a part of that second denial of the gospel that you revel in this celebration of this way of life that God is supposed to somehow bless. Then, the third thing he says here is that they think about worldly things and then he contrasts that with our citizenship being in Heaven with Christ Jesus. Whenever the church, whenever the gospel becomes used to just promote some sort of other agenda besides...the things of the world, besides the agenda of God reclaiming and redeeming his creation, then Paul is going to have a big problem with that.

Now, there are some people who can do this in a sort of supernatural way. He was doing that with Colossians. Well, that's what was happening in Colossae where there was all this angelic speculation and generation of angels. But what it was doing was it was cultivating pride and it was cultivating a life that Paul called worldly even though it was supposedly heavenly. So, you can do this in a super naturalistic way and be on

the wrong side of Paul. Or you could do it in a naturalistic way and be on the wrong side of Paul where you reduce the whole Christian story, the whole biblical view, the whole theological project to just serving this world's ends. And honestly, in the last couple hundred years that has been the greatest tendency of the church in the West, where with a very strong anti-super naturalistic bias, you know, God doesn't do miracles, God couldn't bring a virgin child into the world, and dead people don't rise from the dead. There has been this project to reconcile Christianity with that worldview, a worldly worldview that comes and takes charge of the biblical worldview and won't let it speak its peace so that all the church is left with is bare-knuckle politics and just sort of a vague "do good-ism" that has really lost its sense of the power of God to make people over and to make deep and lasting changes in society.

So, I would say for Paul, in terms of this letter in tenants of the gospel that he would want to promote is the power of the cross to bring healing and forgiveness in a relationship with God, the call to obey something beyond our bellies, to submit ourselves to the Lord of universe who has a greater good in store for us in service to him. And to, if I can go over to Colossians, "to seek the things above" and to pay attention to the commonwealth of Heaven, to the city of God, to this ultimate citizenship that calls us beyond earthly loyalties and earthly agendas and to service of his kingdom.

### Question 19:

#### How can we identify and deal with false teachers?

**Student:** Reggie, how does Paul's dealings with false teachers and this book inform us today as to how we are to deal with people who differ from us theologically? How do we decide what's a false teacher and what isn't? And what do we do with those who are maybe false teachers in our church?

**Dr. Kidd:** Okay, Wes. Well, that's a good series of questions. What I think is helpful in Paul is that he here in Philippians is he does give some criteria for distinguishing what is false teaching. We were just saying, deny the cross, make Christianity just about baptizing your appetites, and a totally "this-worldly" approach to living. We live, at least in the West, we live a really confused and confusing ecclesiological landscape. There are just so many choices. But it usually is possible to tell when the cross is being denied and when the Christian life is being reduced to being about baptizing your personal appetites and when the whole agenda is not the kingdom but supporting an earthly pattern of living and existence. It's important to seek to discern where those things are being denied and really seek to find a church, to be a part of a church, to be in submission to a church where the gospel is being preached.

Part of your question is, what do we do when we find untruth or the lack of the gospel in our own church? And there I think it kind of depends on what voice you have and

to the extent that you have a voice, I think that you're responsible, we are responsible in saying, "Here is what the Bible says." And usually churches have a confessional basis, what creeds we're committed to, what particular shape our confession is supposed to take. And we have the responsibility to go and say, "This is what we are supposed to believe but this isn't what I am hearing. Help me understand why." And go from there.

But there is another side to this too. Just because our church situation in the West is so multi-faceted, there are lots of churches that do embrace the gospel, and do so truly. But there are lots of places where they parse the faith somewhat differently, nuance, nuance fine points but even have some pretty deep disagreements about some fairly significant things but they just aren't at the heart of it. There is a responsibility, I think, that Paul would give us to exercise a measure of patience with one another and extend a certain amount of grace on those issues. And, you know, those issues are more like the relationship between God's total sovereignty and our responsibility, meaning and mode of baptism, the exact way that God transitions from Israel to the church. There are any number of things with sort of how we give priority to mercy ministries and evangelism. Often you have matters of gift mix here and sense of calling. So, there is a great need to be discerning about when the gospel itself is at stake and when the gospel itself is not at stake, and when the gospel actually calls us to see past some of our differences, and embrace one another because what holds us together, the blood of Christ, is so much stronger than the differences we have on the way that we nuance the faith.

**Student:** I was just thinking like we talked about earlier the examples of Lydia and the jailer and the demon-possessed girl being from different social and ethnic groups all being brought into one that same kind of thing can be brought over into theological issues, can't it?

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, and you can imagine those three have to exercise a great deal of patience with each other as they bring their cultural baggage and their preferences, their educational levels, their whole upbringings to this whole new family relationship. The point is be committed to the family relationship and to the lordship of Jesus as opposed to my own personal set of priorities.

**Student:** If you happen to find somebody in your church or sphere of influence that is teaching falsity, at what time really, while you are walking along with them, do you say, "Enough is enough." Do you even say that really? Does Paul encourage that or not?

**Dr. Kidd:** I think the principles that Jesus taught about the need to go to a person and give them the opportunity to explain, to repent, that is the place that you begin and the point there is relationship. And if you can't get satisfaction there then, again, the pattern of Jesus is that we are in, if I'm alongside them in a church, we're in submission to a council of some sort, an ecclesiastical board, pastoral oversight and

then I, if I have to alone or if I can get them, we go together and seek adjudication counsel.

**Student:** So, it really seems like this process is difficult and could potentially be really messy. You could be misunderstood. You could have your own motives impugned, that you really could experience some measure of suffering in trying to reconcile these relationships.

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, and that's all the more reason to appreciate, Graham, the logic that Paul is operating on in the letter to the Philippians. He can speak very strongly because he sees himself constrained by this one who became incarnate for us. When he calls us to look not to our own interests but to the interests of others, sometimes the interest of others is to be like really affirming, like "You're doing great, Wes. I'm proud of you. Hang in." And sometimes looking to the interests of others for the sake of their eternal place is to come to them and say, "Graham, you're messing around with really dangerous ideas. This is not good."

And Jesus was willing to lay aside the privileges of the heavenly courts and to come not just to take on my humanity and yours, but to take on the criminality, the ugliness of who I really am, and to be cursed by the Father, to slip into the silence of death, to go into Hell itself that he might rescue me. And sometimes, looking past my interest to your interest will mean coming to you and saying, "Man, I hate to say this but I love you too much to not say it." When we see Paul use this really strong language, we have to appreciate that it's coming out of a passion that he has that people's eternal lives be secured and that they have confidence that on the day of Christ Jesus that they be able to stand with confidence before the Lord without a question of whether or not they have wedded true faith with right living.

And this letter is a great call for all of us to consider the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ in coming into our veil of tears to redeem us. And then to call us to be his hands, his feet, his voices as we walk through what sometimes is the valley of the shadow of death. Which sometimes is just being misunderstood, and sometimes it's seeing relationships that you wish could be better than they are but knowing his fellowship in the middle of those and knowing that there is joy because he is there and in the end there will be the power of his resurrection when he makes all things right.

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