

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE  
**PHILIPPIANS**

DAY

15 - 21

# DAY 15 - Grace through faith, not works

## Read Philippians 3:1-3

**1** Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. **2** Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. **3** For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.

Paul's tone shifts quite dramatically here from 'rejoice in the Lord!' to 'Watch out for those dogs'!!!

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It's worth remembering not to get distracted by verse 2 and forget his first instruction to 'rejoice in the Lord'. Paul reminds us again and again in this letter to rejoice in the lord. We are to remember and celebrate all that Christ has won for us again and again in our lives.

Paul is then passionately opposed to those present across the early church who were requiring new believers in Jesus to physically become Jewish in order to be part of God's covenant people and take on the Law of Moses. For him, this was to go against the New Covenant of Grace that Christ had brought about through his death and resurrection. This also went against the decision made by the Apostles in Acts 15.

## Read Acts 15:1-11

**1** Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

**2** This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. **3** The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. **4** When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

**5** Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

**6** The apostles and elders met to consider this question. **7** After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. **8** God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. **9** He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. **10** Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? **11** No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Paul seems to be warning them of this problem that can so easily creep into the Church (a problem which was present in a big way in the church in Galatia). It is a belief that leads us away from Grace and into the false belief that we can earn our way towards God. This will lead us away from rejoicing in the Lord and living the true life given as a gift of Grace in Christ.

## **Questions**

How could I rejoice in the Lord more in my life?

How could my home be more filled with thanks and praise to God?

Have I allowed confidence/lack of confidence in my own works to affect how I think God sees me?

## **Actions**

Rejoice in the Lord! Spend some time thanking God for what he has done through Christ.

Plan a time in your day that you could spend even just 30 seconds reminding yourself of what Christ did for us. You will find yourself rejoicing!

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you have placed your joy in your own works rather than in Christ's work. Confess those areas to God and humbly turn to the truth. Then thank him for his Grace and forgiveness.

# DAY 16 - Loss for the sake of Christ

## Read Philippians 3:4-8

**4** though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: **5** circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; **6** as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

**7** But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. **8** What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ

Having rejected any teaching that states that we can put any confidence in our own works, Paul then gives them his full works-based credentials. If you could get to God based on your works or an outward sign of your relationship with God, then Paul says he would be at the front of the queue.

He ticks every box that you could think of:

He bares the outward sign of being one of God's people in circumcision

He can trace his ancestry to the tribe of Benjamin

He is the epitome of what it means to be a Hebrew

He followed the Law of Moses and was a highly esteemed Pharisee

He even was so passionate about the Law that he persecuted Christians!

He writes as someone who has everything that this teaching says you need in order to be right with God.

But he looks at his life and says that all of those things that once counted for him are now 'garbage'. The only important thing to his benefit is knowing Christ.

Paul has given up on everything because of the Grace found in Christ and he is strongly urging them to avoid going back to a belief that they must work their way to God. To do so is to leave the very Grace that Christ won for them.

See how strongly he addresses this same problem in his letter to the Galatians.

### **Read Galatians 3:1-14**

**1** You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. **2** I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? **3** Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? **4** Have you experienced [b] so much in vain—if it really was in vain? **5** So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? **6** So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” **7** Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. **8** Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” **9** So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

**10** For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” **11** Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” **12** The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” **13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” **14** He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

## **Questions**

How could I go deeper in my understanding of the Grace given to me in Christ?

Do I ever find myself tending towards the idea that I have to work my way to God?

Do I feel I need to be 'good' (or even perfect) for God to like me?

Do I 'hide' from, or avoid God if I've been 'bad'? How ready am I to confess my sin?

## **Actions**

Invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you where this incredibly common deception might be in your thinking.

Confess any areas and speak the truth that you are saved by Grace through faith. Read Philippians 2:6-11 or (Galatians 3:1-14 above again) and remind yourself of what Christ did for us.

Speak to someone about this. Don't try to live out your faith alone.

# DAY 17 - Complete trust in Christ

## Read Philippians 3:8-9

8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Paul shows us something both very important and beautiful: he trusts completely in Christ alone. He trusts fully and places his faith in the fact that Christ died for our sin, and was raised to life in victory to save us and bring us into relationship with God.

There is a real humility in accepting forgiveness of our sins and relationship with God, purely on the basis of what Christ has done for us. We come humbly before him accepting that what I've done has never (and could never) be enough to get to our Holy God.

In the same vein, there is actually a subtle pride that lives in our hearts to believe that we can earn our way to, or from God by our own works.

Instead we all stand together utterly dependent on Jesus Christ alone. Not one of us more or less in need of Grace than any other: all hopeless without Christ.

Paul places no confidence in his own ability to get to God, instead the only way he can be found in Christ is through the righteousness that comes from Christ.



Paul also spoke in his letter to the Romans of this same faith.

### **Read Romans 3:16-17**

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

All Paul can do is put his faith in Christ.

All *we* can do is put our faith in Christ.

Like Paul, we truly are found in Christ. We have been made right with God and we can relax and rejoice in that reality.

### **Questions**

Have we fully realised the humbling reality that I did nothing good enough to get to God?

Have we grasped the incredible gift that God gave us in Christ, how he did *everything* for us?

### **Actions**

Pray humbly and thank God that he is the source of our forgiveness and that his Grace is the only way we can know him.

Invite the Holy Spirit to show you where you have believed that your salvation is dependent on you. Turn away from it and pray and put your full trust in Christ alone.

Rejoice in what God has done for us. Celebrate it!

# DAY 18 - We will rise with Christ

## Read Philippians 3:10-11

**10** I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

We see here the ultimate reality of what following Christ will bring. Jesus was raised from the dead, and the promise is that we too shall raise with him into eternal life.

Sometimes the impact of this concrete reality of this future can be hard to grasp or can simply be forgotten for days or weeks at a time in our lives. Tomorrow we will see how this reality can impact our lives, but for today we'll focus on the truth itself.

In 1:6 and 1:10 Paul spoke to the Philippians of 'the day of Christ'. The day when Christ will return and all who belong to Christ will be raised with him into eternal life. It is so important for Paul that we understand two important truths about resurrection:

1. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and has the name above all names (Philippians 2:6-11)
2. We will rise from the dead to be with him when he returns in glory (Philippians 3:20-21)

We see in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that these are not two separate beliefs, but two parts of the same reality.

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-14

**12** But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? **13** If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. **14** And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. **15** More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. **16** For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. **17** And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. **18** Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. **19** If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. **20** But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **21** For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. **22** For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. **23** But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. **24** Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

The reality that we will raise from the dead with Christ is the hope that puts all of our life in its proper context.

We looked at suffering on Day 5, but here too Paul sees his experience of suffering within the beautiful reality that he will follow Christ into resurrection. This shows him that his current sufferings are part of a sharing in Christ's suffering and death that also leads (however painfully) to a glorious resurrection with Christ.

### Questions

How does our future hope impact the way I live today? Do I ever think about it?

Am I suffering because of my faith in Christ?

## **Actions**

Spend some time praying with someone thanking God that rose from the dead, and that we will be raised with him.

Thank God that our eternal future is secure in him.

Read the whole of 1 Corinthians 15.

Take heart. Wherever you find yourself suffering because of your faith in Christ, remember that you are sharing in Christ's suffering and you too will be raised with him into eternal life.

# DAY 19 - Pressing on

## Read Philippians 3:10-14

10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul now moves from verses 10-11 that we read yesterday, back into the current reality for them (and still for us). We have not yet been raised from the dead and therefore have not yet obtained everything that comes through Christ.

Having firmly established the reality of Christ's return (1:6; 1:10) and our future resurrection with Christ (here in verses 10-11 above - which he will stress again in verse 21), he now demonstrates how to live because of that.

There are two things we'll draw out from this to help us live as Paul encourages us to:

1. Our focus on our future hope should not lead to an absence of effort now
2. We should, however, keep our future hope at the forefront of our minds rather than earthly things

We'll look at the first of these today and the second tomorrow.

Paul uses a sporting metaphor here: he uses the language of running a race.

Far from becoming complacent, or seeking to earn his way to Christ, Paul is passionate in his total commitment to the work of Christ.

Because Christ has saved him and because his eternal future is secure in Christ, Paul is motivated to 'strain, press on, take hold' of everything there is in Christ right now.

He knows he will win the prize: that's why he runs.

Remember, Paul's prayer is that our love would continue to grow and he expects that once we have received Christ, a radical transformation will happen in us (like doing nothing from selfish ambition and humbly putting others ahead of ourselves). He is saying of himself that because of his future hope, he has been freed to run even faster! He is pursuing God's like and Kingdom on the earth with every fibre of his being and every ounce of strength.

He says a similar thing in his letter to the Colossians. Because of what Christ has done and will do, there should be a joyful transformation in our lives now.

### **Read Colossians 3:1-14**

**1** Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **3** For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. **5** Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. **6** Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

**7** You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. **8** But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. **9** Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices **10** and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. **11** Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

**12** Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

**13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. **14** And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect

## Questions

Is there evidence in my life of this kind of love for others?

What motivates me to show the kind of love we read about in Philippians and in this Colossians passage above?

Have I lost sight of the future hope of eternal life in Christ when seeking to live as a Christian in my day to day?

## Actions

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for his promise that he will return.

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for his promise that we will rise to eternal life with him.

Pray and ask God to help you to be motivated to love not out of duty or striving, but out of the joy of our salvation in Christ.

# DAY 20 - Maturity

## Read Philippians 3:15-19

**15** All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

**16** Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

**17** Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. **18**

For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame.

Their mind is set on earthly things.

Today we come to the second of our two points from yesterday.

We should keep our future hope at the forefront of our minds rather than earthly things.

Paul shows us clearly that maturity in Christ looks like pressing deeper into God. Maturity looks like straining harder after the Kingdom of God and pressing on towards our ultimate destination of eternal life in Christ. Maturity looks like us having our eyes fixed on the incredible reality of Grace and letting that impact everything we do.

This, of course, is not motivated by any attempt to earn salvation or approval from God (remember how passionately he rejected that at the beginning of Chapter), but instead our actions are motivated by our knowledge and revelation of exactly who God is and what he has done for us.

As we saw yesterday, the knowledge that we will raise to eternal life with Christ shouldn't lead us to neglect today. Yet we see also that the struggles and distractions of life in the here and now should also not overwhelm our focus.



We can so easily get bogged down in the realities and stresses of life that we forget where our destination lies and allow our eyes, our desires, and our effort to focus on earthly things. Our lives can so quickly look exactly the same as those who do not know Christ as we give our attention and effort to things that are not God.

Earthly things are not in and of themselves bad, but they can get so into our vision and our hearts that they become the focus of worship (maybe not in words, but in actions). We lose all perspective when this happens and it can lead us to miss out on being used by God to shine into our world as Paul called us to do in 2:16.

Let's also remember the words of Jesus from the sermon on the mount.

### **Read Matthew 6:19-21**

**19** "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

### **Questions**

Where is my treasure and my heart? What does the fruit of my life say?

Are there areas of my life where my mind is set on earthly things?

Am I more concerned with treasures on earth than I am with treasure in heaven?

### **Actions**

Pray and invite the Holy Spirit into your heart. Ask him to help you to live as Jesus and then Paul showed.

Allow God to work in you across the next few weeks, showing you where he wants to draw your attention to him and not earthly things.

Remember the promise from 1:6 'being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Take the pressure off yourself. It is a joy to get to pursue God's kingdom in and through our lives. We are called to do it, but maturity takes time and none of us have 'made it'. None of us will until Christ comes.

With the pressure off...let's give it everything!

# DAY 21 - Strength in trials

## Read Philippians 3:18-4:1

**20** But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. **4:1** Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

Paul has just encouraged them to be mature Christians who have their minds set on Christ and his return, who therefore give everything of their lives now to that end now.

Now he brings it back to where he began this section: Jesus is coming back and we will rise from the dead to be with him into eternity.

But we also see here as we turn from chapter 3 to chapter 4 that not only is he encouraging and inspiring them in their faith, but he is also strengthening them in their struggles.

As we spoke about on day 7, Philippi was a Roman Colony. Christians across the Roman world (at different times and places, and with varying levels of severity) faced persecution because of their faith. Paul is writing this letter from a Roman prison and he's there because of his faith in Christ.

At that time in the Roman Empire, Caesar had been declared to be divine. He was to be seen as Lord and saviour. He was to be worshipped.

For Christians within the Roman world to declare that they were citizens of heaven with Jesus Christ as both Lord and Saviour was to undercut the very foundations of the Roman Empire.

For Paul this led to him experiencing the violent and brutal force of the Roman empire as he was beaten and imprisoned many times. For other Christians it meant being marginalised by society, or even killed.

Paul's encouragement for them to 'stand firm in the Lord' may have been spoken to some who were tempted to turn back from following Christ under the pressure of the world around them.

Every culture throughout history has tried to pull Christians (often very subtly) away from following Jesus by making it hard for those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Our cultures today are no different, and we should be aware of that and not surprised when we feel that threat.

Far from being removed from this world, we are called to live in it and see it transformed. Paul's desire for them (and us) here is that we would 'stand firm in the Lord in this way'. The 'this way' he is talking about is to live with our eyes fixed on things above, straining towards the glorious future that is ahead in Christ.

## **Questions**

Where do you feel pressure to give up believing in Christ or his teachings, or where you want to hide what you believe? Are there certain places or relationships where that is harder?

When I feel that pressure, do I fix my eyes on my future hope in Christ to help me stand firm? Where am I 'standing firm in the Lord'?

## **Actions**

Read the passages suggested on day 7 and pray together with a friend for strength to stand firm in the Gospel. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill us again today.

Share with someone where you find it hard to be a Christian. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you and strengthen you.