

Group Study Outline

Launching

Why might a young Christian think about giving up?

Questions

What is the Christian life according to the examples of Paul (1:12-26), Jesus (2:5-11), Timothy (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30)?

Read Philippians 3:12-4:1

In 7-8, Paul was talking about how much he values Jesus.
How does 12-14, 20-21 help us to see that Christ is so worthwhile?
What is Paul's view of the Christian life (cf in 12-14, 20-21)?
In what ways does this challenge our view of the Christian life?

The main theme of these paragraphs is how professing Christians try to avoid the hardship that the gospel brings.

In 12-14, what has Paul not yet obtained? what is he straining for?
How does this fit with 1:6?
How does this differ from those thinking they have already obtained this?
What would they say the Christian life is like?
What makes such a view of the Christian life attractive?
Why would someone start to believe this?
How will a future-heaven-filling-our-horizon help us be gospel-centred?

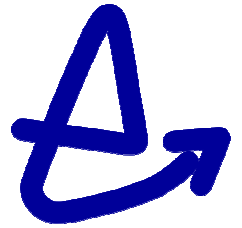
In 18-21, what are the *many* attracted by?
Why might *earthly things* be so attractive for these 1st Philippians?
What would they say the Christian life is like?
What does Paul say is the problem with their compromise?
Where does he say Christians belong? and why is that so good?
How should heaven's citizens live? (cf *citizenship* word is also in 1:27)
How does this talk of heaven's glories fit in with 3:12-14?

What is the example of Paul in Philippians that we are to imitate (17)?
How do people in both of these paragraphs differ from the gospel-centeredness that the whole letter is seeking to encourage?

Conclusion

In what ways do people in Philippi avoid going this way of the cross?
In what ways do I try to avoid going this way of the cross?
What is 'the way of the cross'?
What does it mean for a Christian to *stand firm* (4:1 cf 1:27)?

Philippians 3:12-4:1



Theme Sentence

Stand firm for the gospel rather than avoiding the suffering it brings.

Story Board

Some professing Christians try to avoid the hardship that the gospel brings. That is so different from the others-centred gospel-mindset of Jesus.

For example, some claim that they are already raised with Christ to be complete and perfect now. They think that the road of suffering can be left behind. But we haven't yet arrived. I'm straining with every fibre to arrive in heaven still having a single-minded gospel focus. It's heaven that is my horizon.

Some others have simply compromised with worldliness. They have minds focussed on the here and now as if social acceptance and status matter more than anything else. They are surely hell-bound. How tragic this is when it's heaven that is our home, and what is promised there is so superior to the best this world offers.

In these things, copy my example: living for heaven means living for others' salvation.

Application

- we all want a comfortable life, a life that works well for us and our family. Of course. But Paul is describing the Christian life as going the way of cross alongside Jesus: it's sharing in his suffering now in order to share in his resurrection. In what ways do I try to avoid going this way of the cross?
- search out and copy Christians who are living for the gospel. Beware those whose version of Christianity may be attractive, but who are avoiding sharing the sufferings of Christ.
- am I living as a citizen of heaven? One thing that means is that in all my todays in this world, I invest my energy in the future, doing now what will matter for eternity. Is that my mind-set?

Verse by verse

Just as Philippians 2 described the way of the cross, Philippians 3 is about how some have tried to avoid it.

The call of the gospel is *not only to believe* but also *to suffer* (1:29) the reproach, contradiction and persecution received at the hands of a hostile world. Being a partner in the gospel means *sharing in (Christ's) sufferings, becoming like him in his death* (3:10), which has been spelt out in 2:5-11. In other words, the only authentic Christianity is cross-shaped, putting self-interest aside for the sake of others' salvation.

How easily Christians can become enemies of the cross/of the mind of Christ. We may profess him but then live in such a way that we don't have to take the flak. Chapter 3 describes three ways to do this:

- adopting religious rites 2-11
- claiming resurrection perfectionism 12-16
- compromising with worldliness 17-21.

Heeding this chapter's warning is how to *stand firm* (4:1).

The compromisers (3:17-21)

These are Christians by profession (otherwise, why the *tears* in 18?). The problem seems to be not false teaching, but false practise (19), to do with appetites (cf Rom 16:18). Their minds are set not on heavenly things, but captured by the appeal of this world /materialism. This *minds set* word is repeated in Philippians 1:7; 2:2 (x2), 5; 3:15, 16, 19; 4:2, 10 (x2): it's a key theme that we should have a gospel attitude (2:5). The fact that these others face *destruction* puts them together with the *opponents* of the gospel (1:28).

Philippi was a Roman colony proud of its status/citizenship, probably wanting to be more Roman than Rome. We all know how strong is the pressure to conform for the sake of peace, family, prosperity, business, security, social acceptance, etc. Since this was a problem for *many*, not just a few, it shows how powerful the pressure was.

The perfectionists (3:12-16)

It's not difficult to see why some might think they've *already obtained this* (ie *the resurrection from the dead* of 3:11): Eph 2:6 and Col 3:1 suggest as much. The claim seems to be that by the power of the risen Christ, they are *already perfect* (and probably 'perfection' was one of their words). But in doing so, they were forgetting 'the cruciform pattern of discipleship' (Marshall). Incorporation into Christ isn't about being lifted up into a mystical experience beyond suffering, trial, temptation and sin, but about a road of personal cost, involving things like self-denial, prayer, repentance, running the race.

Another way to read this section is to trace the 'heaven-centred' thread running through it.

The mature Christian knows that the future lies in the future

3:11 made it clear that Paul has *the resurrection from the dead* on his mind (cf 1:20-23). He's focussed on arriving at his heavenly destination (12-14) for that is the future for which Jesus *made me his own* and God *called* him. 20-21 repeats that we *await a Saviour*, the supreme Jesus of 2:9-11. And on that future *day of Christ* (1:6, 10; 2:16) we'll be *transformed* and he will *subject all things to himself*.

Paul says that mature Christians will *imitate* him (17 cf 4:9), and *think this way* (15), using the same word as *mind* (2:5) and *minds set on* (19). If we put these verses together, Paul is saying that true Christians will share his and Jesus' others-salvation mind-set, focussed on the realities of heaven and eternity. In contrast, *enemies* (18) are now- and self-centred; *destruction* is their destiny.

The mature Christian will invest their present in the future

Paul used the metaphor of citizenship in *live worthy of* in 1:27, but now he spells it out: with another Lord (above the Emperor), as citizens of his far distant capital, and with utmost effort, every bit of Paul strains towards the *goal/prize* lest he miss out on it all. This is the way to do the *awaiting* of v20. It also requires a good forgettery (13): Paul of course had left behind all his impressive CV of 4b-6. And once he'd sided with Christ, he began to live for the future.

The language of 12-14 comes from the Olympic arena: it's all about strenuous training for the athlete, and eyes focussed on the finishing tape. For Paul that meant *full courage* (or lit. 'full outspokenness' 1:20): even though it may increase the likelihood of martyrdom, he would continue to preach the gospel, because he's living for his future home in heaven (3:20). This is in marked contrast to the *enemies* whose minds are set entirely on this world's *earthly things* (19).

The mature Christian knows their future is guaranteed in the past

Paul presses on *because Christ has made me his own* (12) and *the upward call of God* (14). This is why he is certain that what he is pressing on towards will not elude him. The future is secure ... it's *what we have attained* (16), though *not obtained* (12), and we know that God *will bring to completion* the good work he's begun (1:6).

So, 4:1 is Paul's application. As he looks forward to the day of Christ's return, what will make him *proud* (2:16) and be his *crown*? It is if they *stand firm* (cf 1:27), which means ...

- not ducking out when the gospel becomes controversial
- living for heaven by self-sacrificially seeking others' salvation.