

MONDAY, 9/2

Read Philippians 3:15-16.

Every Christian should aim for spiritual maturity. Perhaps the best example in scripture of what that means is of an anchored ship. Though the ship may winds and waves, it remains tethered to a source of stability. Contrast this with a ship that is being buffeted on the open seas, rocking dangerously to and fro. As those in Christ, the more we seek Him and come to know Him, the more we become anchored in Him. As His words shape our hearts and give us wisdom, we can more clearly see what it means to follow Him in our daily lives.

In keeping with one of the primary themes of Philippians, Paul says that the mature Christian will adopt a certain perspective with regard to their lives. What perspective is that? It is the perspective of Christ Himself. Paul often refers to this as the mind of Christ. This means that we think like Jesus did about our lives.

The perspective Paul is encouraging the church to adopt is laid out in the previous verses in Philippians 3:7-14. Paul states that the greatest gift in life is to know Christ and to discover the life that is in Him. Paul hones in on the eternal nature of this life and speaks to how our eternal life leads us to a greater purpose in this life. We now live with a heavenly perspective and seek to pour out of lives with our glorious hope of resurrection in mind. This life will look like a life of love and service toward our neighbors to the glory of God.

In verse 16, Paul says, "Only let us live up to what we have already attained." What have we attained? We have been given life. Jesus has invited us into a glorious new kind of existence. Think back to Philippians 2. The way of life in this world is to serve ourselves and look to our own interests, often at the expense of others. Our new life in Christ frees us from that. Since we have been given the gift of life, we don't have to fight and claw our way to significance. Jesus has given that to us. We are free to serve our neighbor, treating their interests as greater than our own. That is the only way to live that is truly free.

Paul says it is this heavenly, Christ-like perspective to which we must aspire. Jesus has given this life to us. Now, armed with His grace and power at work in us, let's seek to live into it.

Praying Together:

"Lord, You have given me the gift of the life that is truly life. You have freed me to love my neighbor and live with a glorious new purpose. I cannot attain this life without You. You made it possible, yet I am able to grow into it only with Your help. Teach me and empower me in this new way of living. Amen."

TUESDAY, 9/3

Read Philippians 3:17.

"Follow my example," Paul said. These are bold words from Paul. I wonder if you could say the same to your children or grandchildren.

Yes, these are indeed bold words, but they are also the words any disciple-maker should be able to say. Here is what I mean by that. Paul is not claiming to be perfect. What he is claiming is that he is pursuing Jesus. Even when he stumbles, he will get up, confess, and continue to move toward Christ. Paul may not always get it right, but his trajectory is clear. He is moving toward Christ and living a life of service to Him. This is what he is asking the church to emulate.

I wonder what the trajectory of your life looks like. Does it look like what Paul describes here?

These are important things to consider as you and I are called to be such examples for others in our lives. We are all called to be leaders and models for the life in Christ. Like Paul, we won't always get it right, but we must ensure that we are aiming and moving toward the right goal, which is seeking to live into the potential of our life with Christ.

Paul also mentions here that he isn't the only example to which the church needs to look for encouragement. Who else does Paul have in mind? In chapter 2, Paul mentions three people: Jesus, Epaphroditus and Timothy. Each of these, in their own unique ways, embodied the gospel message of commitment and sacrifice for the Kingdom. They lived out the very love to which we are called in tangible ways. Paul adds his name to the list, so that the church will see some examples of people who are doing it right, so to speak.

I wonder what examples to whom you can look for encouragement in your faith.

Praying Together:

"Father, thank You for the people You have placed around me who are examples of what it means to walk with You and serve You. Use their witness to spur me on to a greater commitment to Your Kingdom and growth in my walk with Christ. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 9/4

Read Philippians 3:18-19.

In verse 17, Paul points to the wonderful examples the church has of those who are running the race well, who are living out their life with Christ. Here, he looks to the other side, those who are enemies to this life and to Christ Himself.

It is unclear exactly whom Paul has in mind here. It could be his Roman captors or opponents to his ministry. Whoever it is, notice Paul's attitude toward them. Paul grieves for them. He isn't driven by anger, but by love and compassion for them. There is one other person in the gospels who displays such an attitude toward those who could be called enemies--Jesus.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He looked out over a city that had rejected Him and the prophets before Him. He wept over them, wishing that they had embraced Him and been spared the coming tragedy. Jesus also prayed over the very men who beat Him, asking God to forgive them "for they know not what they do."

It's important that we highlight the way Paul and Jesus view opponents to the gospel. You and I can think of some we might consider enemies of the cross, but the question is this: what is our attitude toward them? I recently heard the title of a podcast label our culture today as "the age of outrage". Unfortunately, that captures the spirit of our culture today, and the church is often found in the mix. In doing so, we look all too much like our neighbors when we are called to be set apart.

Part of having the mind of Christ is to be able to see opponents of Christ as He did. Lord, please transform our hearts!

Part of the reason Paul grieves for his enemies is that he knows what is in store for them--destruction. Their attitude will lead only to their downfall. Jesus saw the same in the people of Jerusalem. Jesus wanted better for them than that. Why, might you ask? Jesus wanted better

for them because He loved them. While people may be enemies to Christ or the church, we don't see them as only that. We want "them" to become one of "us"--to find life in Christ like we have. This is why we grieve for them and heed the call to love and serve our enemies. We want them to have the same life-changing encounter with Christ that we have had.

**Praying Together:**

"Jesus, give us Your mind so that we can think about others and the world as You do. Transform our hearts and minds. Too often our love is so small and our anger so great. Calm the storm inside of us. Heal us and free us to love as You do, so that we might bring Your glory, Amen."

THURSDAY, 9/5

Read Philippians 3:20.

In Philippians, Paul has already brought home the idea that as those in Christ, we are to have the mind of Christ. We are to adopt His attitude and perspective for our lives. This leads to a completely different way of seeing the world, and, as a result, a different way of living. This perspective leads us to serve others and value their interests and even love our enemies.

Why is it that we adopt such an attitude? We do so because we are citizens of heaven. As those in Christ, we have been given a place with Him in the Kingdom of God. This is the greatest gift and the glory of our lives.

The truth scripture holds before us is that this world is passing away. Our earthly citizenship will someday end because the world as we know it will cease to exist. It is destined to be renewed by God's Kingdom, a Kingdom where there is no Jew or Greek, man or woman, for all are one in Christ. This is our destiny, and what a hopeful future it is indeed!

It's important to note that it is our citizenship in heaven that guides our citizenship on earth. Though we are alive here on earth, our true life is with Christ. As a result, we choose to live by the principles of God's Kingdom rather than by earthly rules. A good example of this is back in Philippians 2. The way of the world is to claw your way over your neighbor, while the way of the Kingdom is to stoop down to serve them. The way of the Kingdom leads us to be much more fruitful citizens on earth than any other.

The Bible will expound on this further. In Romans 13, Paul calls us to be good citizens on Earth and to submit to ruling authorities, which must have been hard words for the church in Rome to read at the time. We participate in the duties of our country while never putting hope in the country to save us. Jesus has already done that. The passing world cannot save us if it cannot even save itself. No, we are "eagerly awaiting a Savior from there." Our hope is in Christ, and this hope informs how we live.

Paul's point is that our heavenly citizenship should make us the most fruitful citizens in whichever country Christians find themselves. They should see themselves as servants seeking the good of others.

**Praying Together:**

"Lord, our life is in You. We celebrate that our names are written in the Book of Life. We long for our true citizenship with You in Your Kingdom. Show us and teach us how our true citizenship in the Kingdom informs our temporary citizenship here. Help us to point to God's Kingdom in all we do. Amen."

FRIDAY, 9/6

Read Philippians 4:1.

As we dip into chapter 4, Paul shifts to some closing remarks to the church. He is getting ready to button up the letter, but there are still some important points to be made.

The first thing on Paul's mind is to encourage them to "stand firm in the Lord." Of course, Paul doesn't just give them a flat command. He shows them that this request comes out of his love and gratitude for their partnership in Christ's work.

If you have been reading with us through the book of Philippians, you might recognize the phrase "stand firm in the Lord," as this isn't the first time Paul uses it in the letter. It shows up for the first time in Philippians 1:27, which is arguably the defining verse of the entire letter.

There Paul urges the church to conduct themselves in a "manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" and in this to "stand firm" in one spirit. This is a call to unity. He uses it with the same intent in Philippians 4:1.

Part of the motivation for Paul's writing this letter to the church is to encourage them to be united. It is clear from the focus of the letter and examples given that there were some disagreements and divisions in the church. It happens in church life, or just ordinary life for that matter. Paul wants to remind the church that the call of Christ demands a different response to anything that would threaten the harmony of Christ's body. They are to stand firm in their identity as those who belong to Christ. They are to strive to maintain the same spirit as Christ Himself, who was willing to make sacrifices for the interests of others. Like Christ, we are to give of ourselves for the good of others, especially the church.

I wonder what it looks like for you to stand firm in the Lord. How can we, as a church, continue to seek unity of spirit with the help of the Holy Spirit?

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, together we want to stand firm in the Lord. Help us maintain the same spirit of Christ in our life together. May we show the unity of Jesus' body so that we can be the witness to the world to which we are called. Amen."

SATURDAY, 9/7

Read Philippians 4:2.

We would all love to be remembered. We would love for our legacy to extend beyond our lives. With that being said, I doubt many of us would like to be remembered the way Euodia and Syntyche are remembered here.

We don't know exactly who they are, but we do know that they are two women in the church at Philippi who are struggling to get along. We don't know what the source of contention was between them, and I'm not sure it really matters. We can get to the point without knowing the details.

For Paul, no personal squabble should undermine the unity Jesus wants in His church. The unity of the church is a witness to the world of what it looks like when Jesus reigns. We should model our

life after Him. In order to do so, we must adopt His mind, which is what Paul pleads for between them.

Paul isn't just telling them to drop it and get over it. No, there needs to be a true resolution. The Christ-like way of dealing with disagreements is to go to the other in humility. It is to call out sin, not from a place of "I told you so," but out of love. It also must include confessing our sin and extending forgiveness to the other. This is what allows there to be true reconciliation, which is what Jesus wants. Jesus has called us to be a people who seek reconciliation in our relationships. We must approach every relationship, especially when there is conflict, with the humility necessary to find healing.

Euodia and Syntyche will forever be known in the scriptures because of their conflict with each other. I hope they heard Paul's encouragement and were able to mend whatever had come between them.

The real question for us is, *will we?* Will you seek reconciliation? Will you approach even the tensions in your relationship with humility and honesty? Are you willing to confess your sin in the matter and forgive the sins of the other? This is the call to which you and I have agreed in Christ. Let it be so in us and in our life together.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, be an agent of healing in us. You knew that we would continue to deal with conflicts in our relationships. We choose Your way of dealing with our disputes, even though it challenges us to our core. We know that Your way of seeking reconciliation, as much as it is up to us, is the best way. We surrender to You and Your way. Amen."

SUNDAY, 9/1

Read Philippians 4:3.

After calling out Euodia and Syntyche for their ongoing dispute, Paul pleads that they find help in resolving the matter. Paul loves the two women, for they have each played a role in the cause of Christ. They were both co-laborers with Paul in spreading the Good News of Christ; therefore, it burdened his heart all the more.

Paul calls on Epaphroditus to help with their reconciliation. This is a reminder that the work of reconciliation belongs to the church, not just an individual. This is in line with what Jesus says in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." We are never more like our Father in heaven than when we seek peace. It was the Father who sent His Son to bring peace between Him and us. We too ought to be peacemakers, not only in our own relationships, but in other relationships over which we have influence.

I find it interesting that Paul concludes his plea for peace by pointing to the fact that their names are written in the Book of Life, the book that scriptures say contains the names of those who have new life with Christ.

When the Book of Life is referenced in the New Testament, it is always a cause for joy and celebration. It means that our future has been sealed. Whatever troubles may find us in this world, there is a future waiting for us that this world and its problems cannot touch.

Of course, our name's being found in the Good Book isn't only hope for our future. It also changes how we see our lives here and how we live them. Paul draws on this here. Since the

two women are truly sisters in God's Kingdom, they need to come to terms with that here so that their earthly relationship reflects what will be their future relationship in heaven.

I wonder how this truth might speak into your relationships. Are there any relationships you have that are in need of reconciliation? Are you willing to be the first to show humility and extend forgiveness? What can you do to reflect that those people are your brother or sister in the Lord?

Praying Together:

"Lord, minister to us. It is so easy for pride to consume us when disagreements arise. You emptied Yourself so that You might serve. Help us be emptied of our pride so that we may adopt a humble spirit and thus see You move in power in our relationships to bring about healing and love. Amen."